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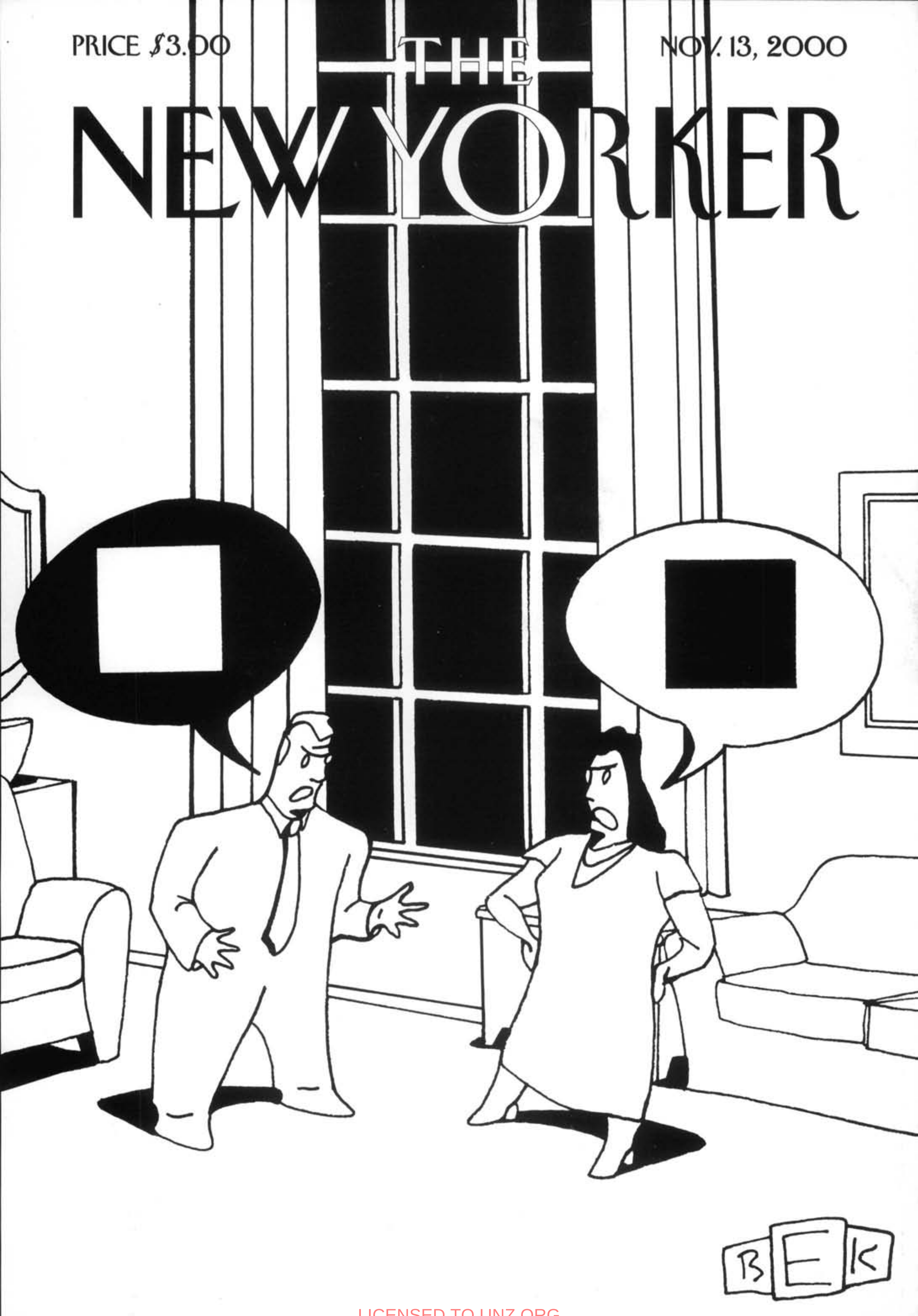
THE NEW YORKER

NOV. 13, 2000



Other cars are starting to look funny.

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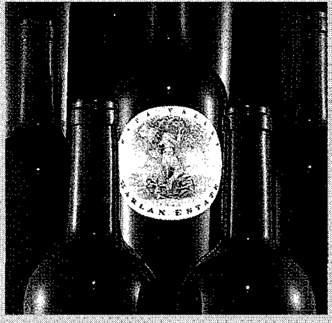
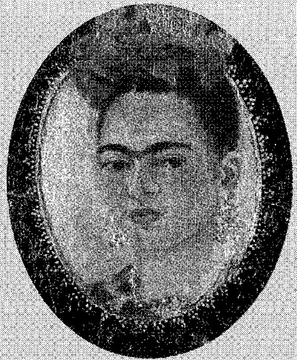

FINE FRENCH AND CONTINENTAL FURNITURE

Exhibition: November 4-10
Auction: November 11

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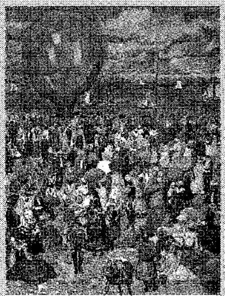
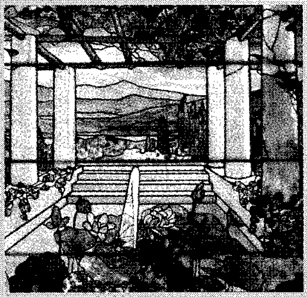
Auction: November 18

LATIN AMERICAN ART

Exhibition: November 16-20
Auctions: November 20 & 21

AMERICAN PAINTINGS, DRAWINGS AND SCULPTURE

Exhibition: November 25-29
Auction: November 30

WORKS OF ART BY LOUIS COMFORT TIFFANY

Exhibition:
November 25-December 1
Auction: December 2

IMPORTANT JEWELS

Exhibition: December 1-5
Auctions: December 6 & 7

ANTIQUITIES AND ISLAMIC ART

Exhibition: December 2-7
Auction: December 8

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Clockwise: A fine Louis XVI ormolu-mounted mahogany commode. height 36 in., width 4 ft. 2¼ in., depth 23¼ in. $100,000–150,000; Property from a European Private Collector. A superb and rare Southern Fang male reliquary guardian figure. height 24 in. $250,000–350,000; A case of Harlan Estate 1991. Per Lot $3,000–4,000; Frida Kahlo. *Autorretrato en Miniatura.* 2 by 1 in. $150,000–200,000; A Sasanian Silver-gilt Plate. diameter 7⅞ in. Estimate on Request; Property of a Lady. Ruby and diamond necklace/bracelet combination, Harry Winston. length 16¾ in. $200,000–250,000; Property of Our Lady of Grace Church, Hoboken, New Jersey. A fine Tiffany favrile leaded glass and enameled landscape window: *View from Laurelton Hall* (detail). height 37 in., length 5 ft. 5½ in. $250,000–350,000; Property from the Collection of Arthur and Holly Magill. Maurice B. Prendergast. *The Balloon.* 20¾ by 15½ in. $2,000,000–3,000,000.

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FALL
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2000

Contemporary Art, Including Property from Lannan Foundation

Exhibition:
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November 12, 1-5 pm
November 13, 10 am-5 pm & 6-8 pm
November 14, 10 am-12 pm

Auctions:
November 14–15

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Andy Warhol
Marilyn, 1962
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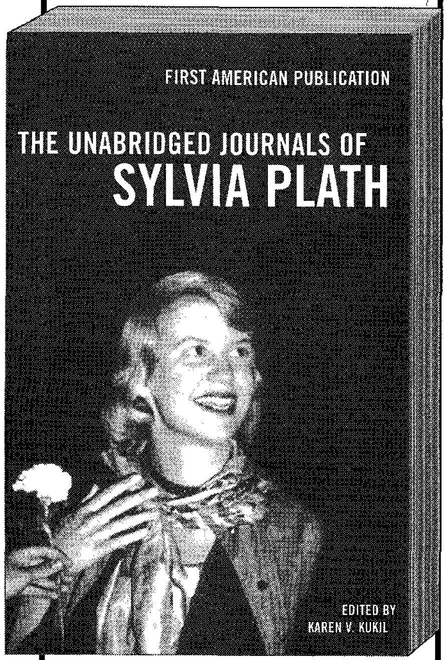
The complete, uncensored journals of Sylvia Plath, published in their entirety for the first time, including photographs never before seen.



"To read Plath's diaries is to see a powerful transitional figure...not only a great writer but a brilliant, tough-minded woman."
—Jill Ker Conway,
author of *The Road from Coorain*

"Fascinating, long-overdue.... *[The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath]* provoke and engage as they reveal and re-mystify [an] irresistible literary icon." —*Elle*

**Publishers Weekly,* starred review

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CONTRIBUTORS

Adam Gopnik ("What Steinberg Saw," p. 140), is a staff writer. His new book, "Paris to the Moon," has just been published.

Woody Allen (Fiction, p. 156) is the director of more than thirty films. His first story for the magazine, "The Gossage-Vardebedian Papers," appeared in 1966.

Bruce Eric Kaplan (Cover) has contributed three hundred cartoons since 1991. A collection of his work, "No One You Know," came out last year.

Jerome Groopman ("Hurting All Over," p. 78) is the Recanati Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School. His articles can be found at www.jeromegroopman.com.

Rebecca Mead ("You've Got Blog," p. 102) became a staff writer in 1997.

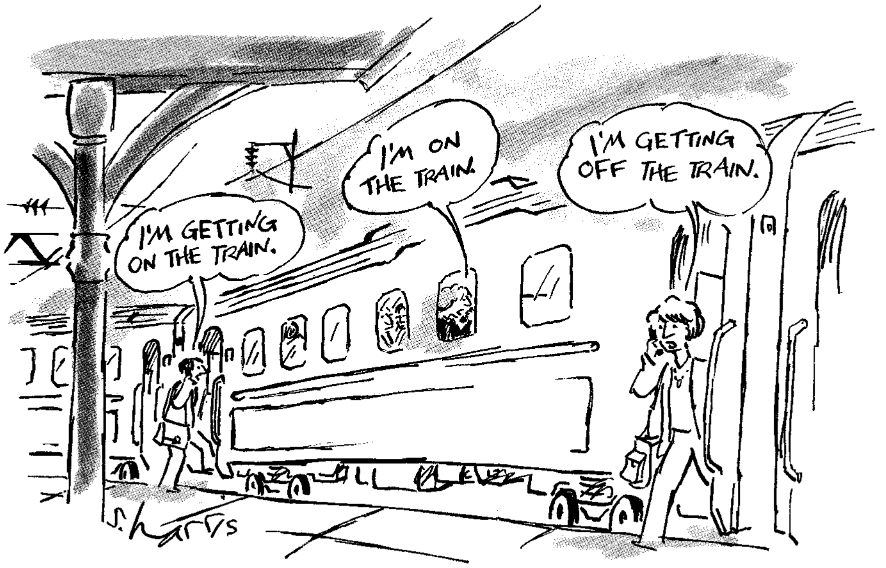
Peter Hessler ("Hamlet Meets Mao," p. 110) spent two years as a Peace Corps teacher in China. A memoir of his experience there, "River Town," will be published in February. He now lives in Beijing and Hong Kong.

Harry Bliss (Sketchbook, p. 132) will publish his first children's book, "A Fine, Fine School," next summer.

David Brooks ("Live from 400," p. 122) is a senior editor at the *Weekly Standard.* His book "Bobos in Paradise" was published in May.

Michael Crawford (Easel, p. 150) is a staff artist and a painter. He has been contributing to the magazine since 1983.

Danny Shanahan (The Back Page, p. 186) is a cartoonist and has been a regular contributor since 1988. ◆



I'M GETTING ON THE TRAIN.
I'M ON THE TRAIN.
I'M GETTING OFF THE TRAIN.
S. Harris

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BIG BAD PHARMA

In defending the hugely profitable drug industry, James Surowiecki fails to acknowledge that a significant amount of the early research that ultimately leads to the development of new medications is funded by American taxpayers through the National Institutes of Health (The Talk of the Town, October 16th & 23rd). The big pharmaceutical companies tend to enter later in the game, when a drug's potential for success, and profitability, is more clearly in sight. Given that these companies also enjoy huge tax breaks—not only for research and development but for their immense marketing costs—it's hard to see them as brave public benefactors in an "immensely risky" business. There's certainly no reason to accept price gouging as the cost of innovation.

Teresa Connors
Los Angeles, Calif.

Surowiecki's implication that few, if any, significant prescription drugs have been developed here in the Great White North stuck in this Canadian craw. I have a good friend who shoots up four times a day with a fluid that allows her to lead an almost normal life. It's called insulin, and the researchers we have to thank for it are Canadian.

Dwight Griffin
Toronto, Ontario

JUSTICE FOR RADIOHEAD

The message of Nick Hornby's review of Radiohead's "challenging" new album, "Kid A," is that the band members should pack themselves back into the bin marked "pop stars," behave, and stop all this fuss about meaning (Pop Music, October 30th). Oh, and while they're at it they should write some more of those shimmery ditties he likes so much. Why does Hornby begrudge the band what he must realize is a tremendously rare opportunity: the chance to do exactly what it wants to do, exactly how it wants to do it? Having control of your own music and career is far from a given in the recording industry. It's hard to ask your label, your audience, and, apparently, your critics to let you push the boundaries. That's why most bands don't even bother. Radiohead is brave to try.

Jason Cilo
New York, N.Y.

Nick Hornby's lament concerning "Kid A" reminded me of my father saying, after he heard "Tomorrow Never Knows" for the first time, that the Beatles should have stuck to "And I Love Her." How dare pop-machine products take a risk? How dare they grow rather than replicate? Hornby apparently hasn't noticed how very comfortable most of Radiohead's contemporaries are with not rocking the boat—or changing a tempo, a tune, or even a sentiment. As a result, it's been years since I've wanted to listen to an album repeatedly to hear what a band was up to. Radiohead hasn't disappointed me. Hornby, meanwhile, should turn on the radio.

Terence Poltrack
Reston, Va.

KENNEDY THE FATHER

Amanda Smith, in her selection of letters written by her controversial grandfather, Joseph P. Kennedy, has little to offer about his alleged anti-Semitism, election rigging, mistresses, or bootlegging ("Family History," October 16th & 23rd). No matter. The letters in which he testily corrects every minute spelling error of Teddy's or gives Jack fatherly advice on how to manipulate members of the press say all one needs to know about the inner nature of the man.

Stephen P. Steinberg
Concord, Mass.

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number to "The Mail," The New Yorker, 4 Times Square, New York, N.Y. 10036. They can also be faxed to 212-286-5047 or sent via E-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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"**Ferociously imagined**, intensely atmospheric...powerfully compelling...*Martha Peake* delivers the goods."
—*Kirkus Reviews*

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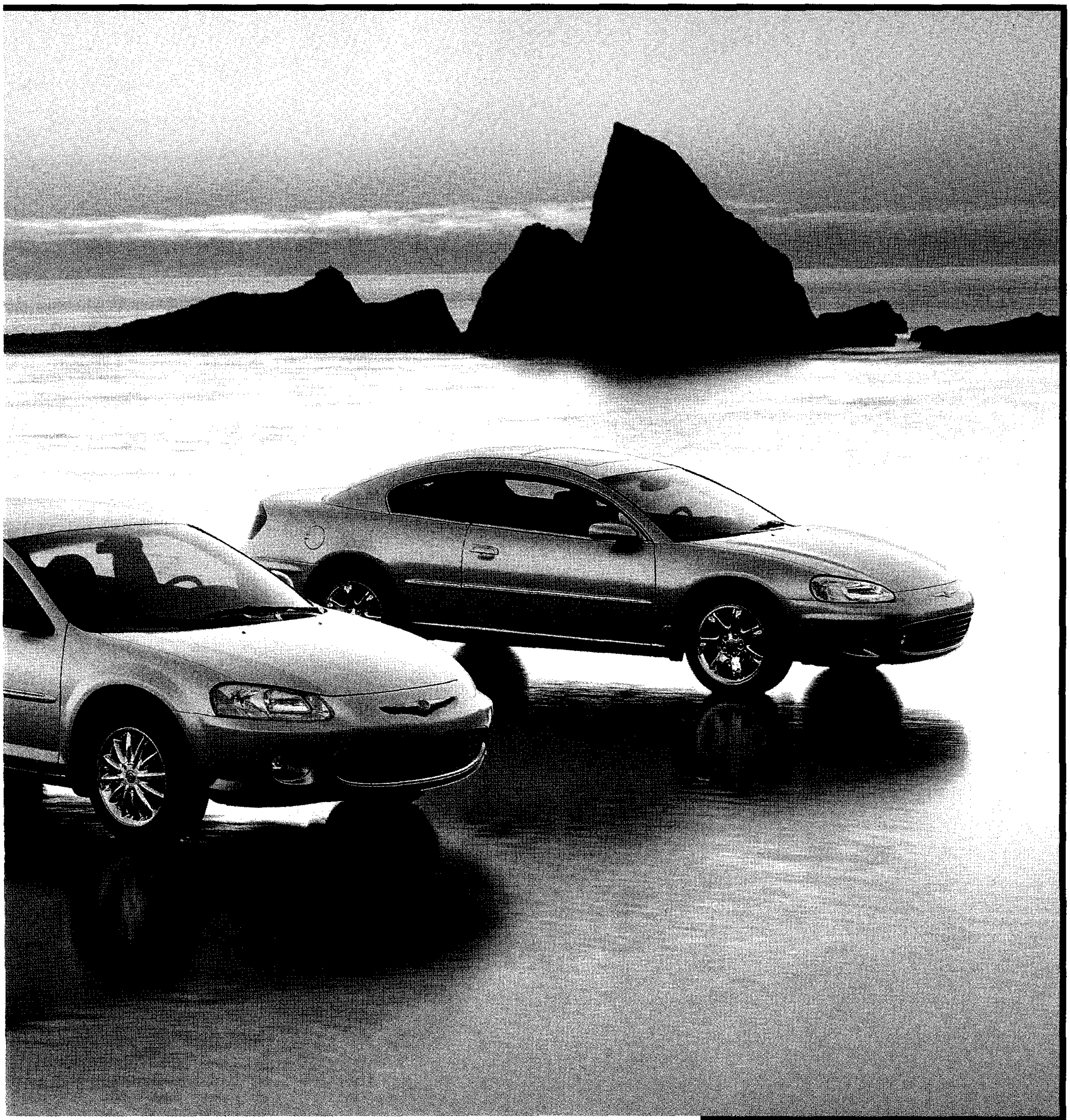

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

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ARSENIC & OLD LACE
Joseph Kesserling's 1941 play is the inaugural performance in City Center's Voices! series of readings, dedicated to rarely revived American plays. One performance only, Nov. 11 at 8. (131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

BETRAYAL
Juliette Binoche, Liev Schreiber, and John Slattery are the love triangle in Harold Pinter's 1980 psychological drama. David Leveaux is the director. In previews. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-9393.)

BOOK OF THE DEAD: SECOND AVENUE
The latest multimedia work by John Moran, an exploration of spirituality in the digital age, set on Second Avenue in New York City and in ancient Egypt. Previews begin Nov. 14. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400.)

COMIC POTENTIAL
Alan Ayckbourn's black comedy imagines a future in which robotlike beings work alongside actors in the film industry. In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

DOWN THE GARDEN PATHS
Eli Wallach and Anne Jackson lead the cast in a new four-couple comedy by Anne Meara. Previews begin Nov. 9. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 397-4100.)

JANE EYRE
The musical. Marla Schaffel is Jane; James Barbour is Rochester. With a book by John Caird and a score by Paul Gordon. Directed by Mr. Caird and Scott Schwartz. In previews. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

KIT MARLOWE
David Grimm's drama examines the tempestuous life of the Elizabethan playwright Christopher Marlowe. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

LIVING IN THE WIND
Cheryl Freeman and Chad L. Coleman portray married ex-slaves trying to rebuild their lives after the Civil War, in a romantic drama by Michael Bradford. In previews through Nov. 12. Opens Nov. 13 at 7. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

MICHAEL MOSCHEN IN MOTION
The conceptual juggler returns to New York for a brief engagement at the Joyce Theatre. Opens Nov. 14 at 8 and continues through Nov. 26. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800.)

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			8	9	10	11
12	13	14				

OLD MONEY
A new play by Wendy Wasserstein, under the direction of Mark Brokaw. John Cullum, Mary Beth Hurt, and Dan Butler are in the cast. Previews begin Nov. 9. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

RICHARD III
The Pearl Theatre Company's version of Shakespeare's play. In previews through Nov. 12. Opens Nov. 13 at 7. (80 St. Mark's Pl. 505-3401.)

THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW
Richard O'Brien's 1975 cult musical, directed by Christopher Ashley and choreographed by Jerry Mitchell. In previews. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

THE SEARCH FOR SIGNS OF INTELLIGENT LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE
Lily Tomlin returns to Broadway in Jane Wagner's 1985 multicharacter solo show. Previews begin Nov. 11. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

WHAT THE BUTLER SAW
The New Group's staging of Joe Orton's 1969 play stars Chloë Sevigny, Dylan Baker, Lisa Emery, and Peter Frechette. In previews through Nov. 11. Opens Nov. 12 at 5. (Theatre at St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

ALICE IN BED
Susan Sontag's 1993 fantasy play, which was inspired by the journals of Henry and William James's sister, Alice. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475.)

BAAL
Bertolt Brecht's first play, produced by Jim Simpson and his lively Bat Theatre Company. The script suffers from many first-play problems (it's too long and occasionally clunky), but it clearly presents several of Brecht's preoccupations—how purely disgusting humans are, and whether that disgustingness can be transcended or defied. As such, "Baal" makes a good primer for his later, greater works. Michael J. X. Gladis, as Baal, is provocative from the first word he speaks; he makes the evening worthwhile not just dramaturgically but also dramatically. (Flea Theatre, 41 White St., between Broadway and Church St. 226-2407.)

A CLASS ACT
The late Ed Kleban's life following his success as the lyricist of "A Chorus Line" is the basis of this musical. With music and lyrics by Mr. Kleban and a book by Linda Kline and Lonny Price. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

COBB
An encore production of Lee Blessing's play about the baseball legend Ty Cobb, which was originally staged by the Melting Pot Theatre last spring. (Lucille Lortel Theatre, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The New Federal Theatre presents a political thriller by Jay Broad, in which a U.S. President attempts to oust a black Supreme Court Justice. (Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand St. 279-4200.)

DAHLING
Nan Schmid has the role of Tallulah Bankhead in a drama about the actress's life, in which seven other actors portray fifty-odd characters. (Grove Street Playhouse, 39 Grove St. 358-5812.)

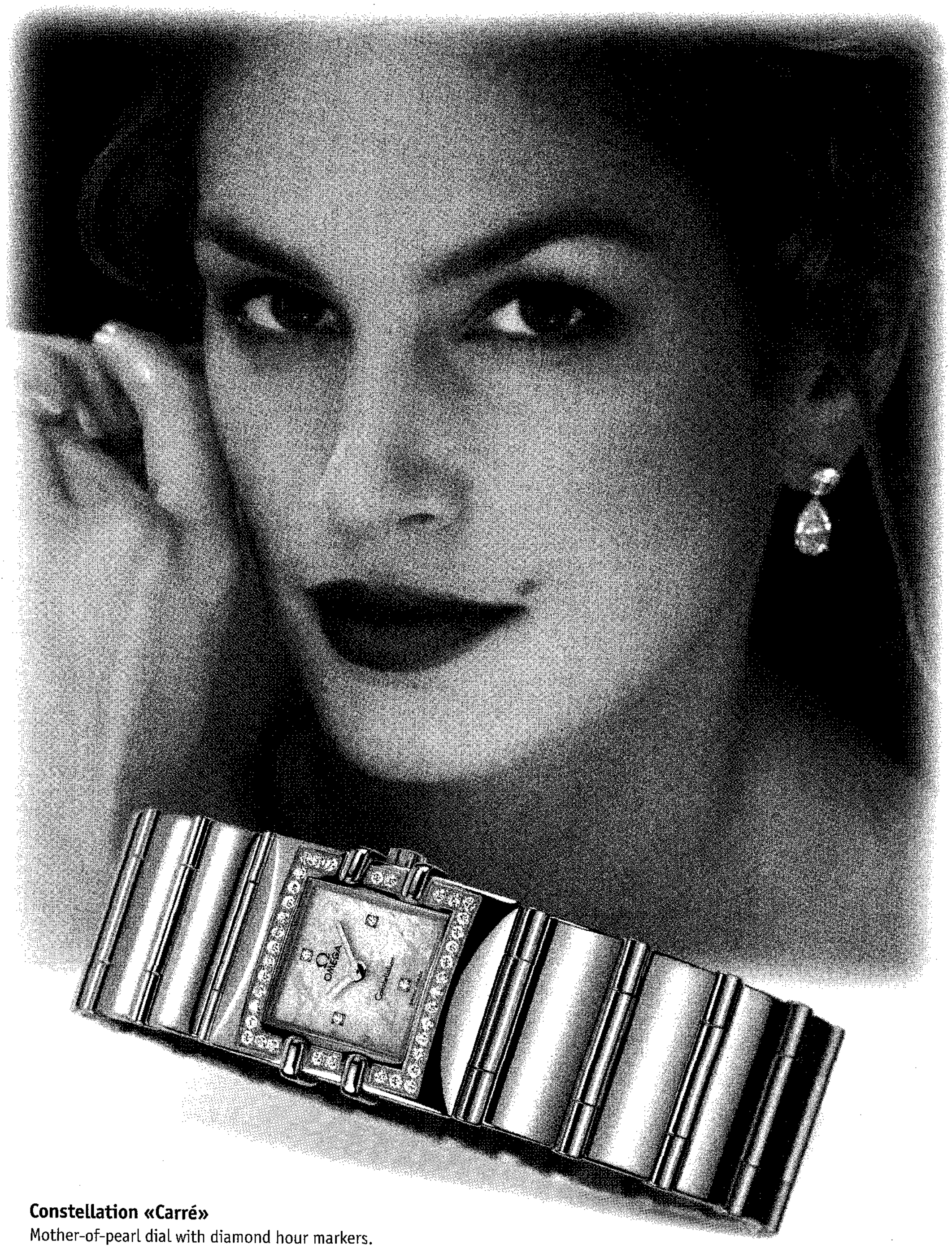
THE DEATH OF DON FLAGRANTE DELICTO
Kirk Wood Bromley's latest play is set in the South in 1865, at the plantation of an eccentric genius. (Greenwich Street Theatre, 47 Greenwich St. 501-4528. Closes Nov. 19.)

THE DINNER PARTY
Neil Simon's new comedy is set in an opulent restaurant in Paris, and his six characters—three divorced couples—are not the usual transplanted, fish-out-of-water Simon-Americans of his "Suite" plays but are actually French, or are meant to be. (Can a character who, when asked if he likes Fragonard, replies, "Not before dinner, no," really be French?) Despite having the trappings of a departure, the play is essentially traditional fare; the usual running, or limping, gags are in ready supply, and the secondhand shtick, often in the form of æons-old alimony jokes, flows freely along this Boulevard of Broken Marriages. The generally swell cast—Len Cariou, John Ritter, Veanne Cox, Penny Fuller, Henry Winkler, and Jan Maxwell—is under the direction of John Rando. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/6/00.) (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY 2001: A SPOOF ODYSSEY
The latest edition of Gerard Alessandrini's ongoing musical satire of the players and the plays along the Great White Way. (Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200.)

FOUR GUYS NAMED JOSÉ . . . AND UNA MUJER NAMED MARIA
This crowd-pleasing, crayon-colored revue of Latin song and dance is knowingly broad and hammy. But the talented cast send up the singers and songs that helped create Latin stereotypes and deliver the remaining material—dance songs, songs of nostal-

Cindy
Crawford's Choice



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gia for one's homeland, songs of love, songs about women named Maria—with exuberant wit and affection. (Blue Angel, 323 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

THE FULL MONTY
The musical version of the 1997 movie, about a group of unemployed factory workers who try to earn some cash by stripping, is faithful to the original story—even though the locale has been shifted from the North of England to Buffalo—and it has all the spirit and charm and heart of the original but, as befits a Broadway production, on a much larger, pizzazzier scale. Instead of being touched, you're likely to be moved up out of your seat by the display of musical and choreographic bravura onstage. Early on, Terrence McNally's book and David Yazbek's songs strike the notes of class consciousness and unemployment-related low male self-esteem a little too hard—you may think you're in for a musical version of Susan Faludi's "Stiffed"—but soon enough the show's winning good humor and inventiveness kick in, and if you don't find yourself laughing consistently (and tearing up occasionally), well, then, maybe you don't *deserve* to see six men dancing around in red G-strings. The terrific cast, which includes Patrick Wilson, John Ellison Conlee, André De Shields, and Emily Skinner, and Kathleen Freeman as an old show-biz bawd, is under the fine direction of Jack O'Brien, and the delightful dancing is courtesy of Jerry Mitchell. A word to wise parents: the show's ribaldry is harmless and funny, but it's not for the Pokémon set. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

GAME SHOW
The action of Bob Walton and Jeffrey Finn's "play" clumsily shifts from a trivia contest between audience volunteers to scripted, behind-the-scenes backstabbing between the producer (Cheryl Stern) and the host (Michael McGrath) of the show within the show. Rather than taking this setup for what it is—a gimmick—the creators have tried to furnish it with an actual plot, and the drama that unfolds during the "commercial breaks" is embarrassingly flat. The participatory sequences, though, are surprisingly amusing, if only because they involve laughing at the contestants (at a recent show, a professional woman defined a "gynephobe" as a person who is afraid of giants). (45 Bleecker, at 45 Bleecker St. 307-4100.)

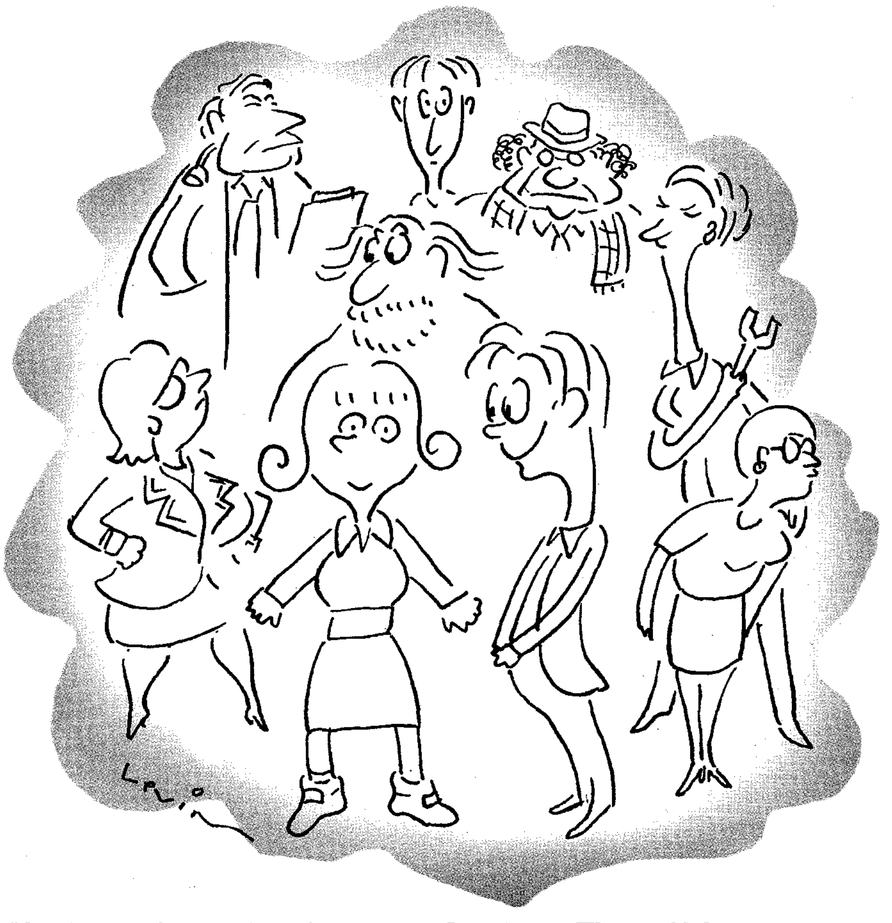
***GORE VIDAL'S* THE BEST MAN**
Gore Vidal's sophisticated, elegant, and damned entertaining 1960 play about the politics of politics, whose mots are as eerily accurate for Shrub and Al as they were, originally, for Adlai and Tricky Dick. Rather than a satire, the play is a comedy of manners (or, rather, of bad political manners) which shares with the eighteenth century an obsession with façade—its invention, manipulation, and exposure. Directed by Ethan McSweeny. (10/2/00) (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

THE GOREY DETAILS
A musical inspired by the works of the author-illustrator Edward Gorey. With a score by Peter Matz and direction by Daniel Levans. (Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

HIGHWAY TO TOMORROW
Elevator Repair Service's latest show, based on Euripides' "Bacchae," incorporates choreography, found-object puppets, Afro-pop, and recorded sound effects. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., at Spring St. 647-0202.)

THE HOSTAGE
From the Irish Rep, Brendan Behan's 1958 black comedy, in which a British soldier is held captive by a former I.R.A. commander. Directed by Charlotte Moore. (132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK
Even a spirited performance by Jim Nelson, as the feckless, braggart "paycock" of the title, can't get this otherwise flat Roundabout Theatre production of Sean O'Casey's 1924 tragicomedy off the ground. The script dramatizes the reach of Irish political violence and its appalling personal costs, but here most of the characters aren't played engagingly enough to interest the audience. As a result, a compelling tragedy has been transformed into a collection of somewhat amusing and occasionally sad clichés. (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)



"Comic Potential," by Alan Ayckbourn, at Manhattan Theatre Club.

THE LADY FROM THE SEA
The sixth installment in the Century Center's Ibsen series. (111 E. 15th St. 982-6782. Closes Nov. 18.)

LES MIZRAHI
The fashion designer Isaac Mizrahi has an endearing and winning personality, which sets this new cabaret act—the first in a series at the Drama Dept.—aglow. But Mizrahi's mélange of songs, conversation, and sewing, as svelte as the designer's newly slender figure, has been staged and rehearsed to death by Richard Move. It's not until he moves into the house for a brief improvised interlude to dole out Rice Krispies treats that the audience gets to experience the real Mizrahi. If only the fashionista would realize he's much more entertaining when he's being, rather than playing, himself. (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 239-6200.)

LIFEGAME
A show by the British troupe Improbable Theatre, in which a different onstage guest's life story becomes the basis of the improv drama each night. (Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200.)

THE LIGHT OUTSIDE
From the Flea Theatre, a black domestic comedy by Kate Robins. (41 White St., between Broadway and Church St. 226-2407.)

LYPSINKA! THE BOXED SET
The star (a.k.a. John Epperson) makes her first concert appearance in seven years. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 307-4100.)

MARCEL MARCEAU
The silent Frenchman, performing solo and with his twelve-mime company. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. Closes Nov. 12.)

MAYBE BABY, IT'S YOU
Love in the big city, explained with many laughs by the show's accomplished writer-performers, Charlie Shanian and Shari Simpson. There's an undercurrent of sweetness and longing that makes the evening more than a series of skits. (Theatre at St. Luke's, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

THE MUSIC MAN
This delightful revival of Meredith Willson's 1957 musical, directed by Susan Stroman and starring Craig Bierko, hits us with the simplicity and seamlessness of a perfect fairy tale, and it puts music in its proper place—right up there with all the other miracles of life. (5/22/00) (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.)

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE
The Adobe Theatre Company's modern take on the Greek myth. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 279-4200.)

PROOF
The Manhattan Theatre Club's staging of David Auburn's drama, starring Mary-Louise Parker, is reopening on Broadway. Daniel Sullivan is the director. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

RED ROSES AND PETROL
A woman in Dublin prepares for her husband's funeral and for the return of her children from England and America, in a drama by Joseph O'Connor. (Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 581-4125.)

STRANGER
In Craig Lucas's new play, two strangers with dicey pasts meet on a plane—a man fresh from a long prison term, who has given his life over to Jesus (David Strathairn), and a woman damaged by her liberal parents' neglect ("They just love their skis"), who has amply demonstrated her own capacity for doing damage (Kyra Sedgwick). Lucas has in the past memorably dramatized life's ambiguities, but the road he's taken here has led him into a thicket of dull incomprehensibility; the characters arrive at their destination at the end of the first act, but for the audience the entire play is a long trip to nowhere. Directed by Mark Brokaw. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 353-0303. Closes Nov. 19.)

THE SYRINGA TREE
A tour-de-force solo drama, written by and starring South African native and first-time playwright Pamela Gien, who gives an extraordinary performance in all twenty-three roles. It's a love story, really, about the strong, lasting bond between a white girl and her black nanny in South Africa which begins in 1965, and continues through the

ARNIE LEVIN

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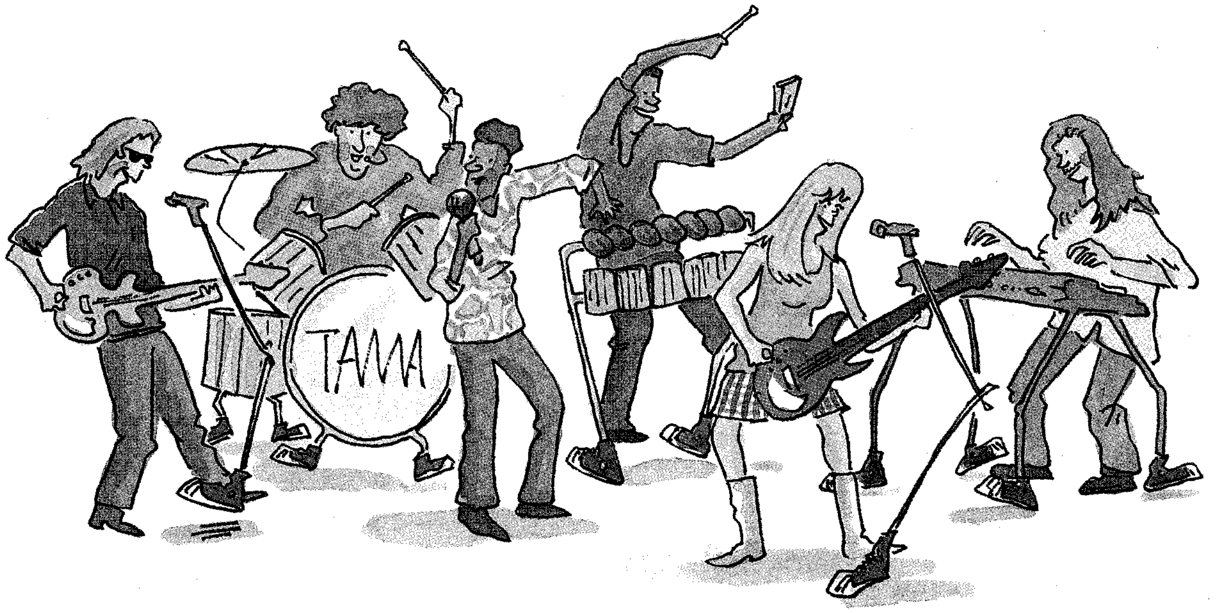
following twenty years of turbulent and violent upheavals over apartheid. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 307-4100.)

TABLETOP
Rob Ackerman's real-time comedy, a behind-the-scenes look at television-commercial making. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

THE TALE OF THE ALLERGIST'S WIFE
Charles Busch's satire of New York intellectual angst, staged by Manhattan Theatre Club, moves to Broadway. Linda Lavin, Tony Roberts, and Michele Lee star. Lynn Meadow is the director. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

TALLULAH HALLELUJAH!
Tovah Feldshuh's engaging portrait of the stage-and-screen siren Tallulah Bankhead. Feldshuh, who also stars, has set the show in 1956, by which time Bankhead was well aware that she had turned herself into a joke in pursuit of her art. As the action opens, she's just flopped in a revival of "A Streetcar Named Desire"; nonetheless, she takes the stage at a U.S.O. benefit, where, as the evening goes on, she regales the audience with the lowdown on her life, several marvellous standards, and a bunch of charmingly dirty limericks. (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)



The Tom Tom Club brings the infectious dance-music sounds of its latest album, "The Good the Bad and the Funky," to S.O.B.'s.

DANNY SHANAHAN

THE UNEXPECTED MAN
There are only two actors in this small gem by Yasmina Reza, the author of "Art," but they are not just any two—they are Alan Bates and the magnificent Eileen Atkins, who are sharing a compartment on a Paris-to-Frankfurt train. He is a writer, and she, unbeknownst to him, is his ideal reader; their private reflections weave around and play off each other until the two passengers finally address each other directly. Reza's artfulness in presenting their thoughts—his discontent, her insightful analysis of his books and rueful reminiscences of friendships—makes this a very grownup play about separateness and connection, about the art of life. Directed by Matthew Warchus. (11/6/00) (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

DANCE

MERCE CUNNINGHAM DANCE COMPANY
The company performs a week of ninety-minute Events, Cunningham's trademark collage of repertory works excerpted and adapted for a particular performance space. The New York season will include selections from "Winterbranch" (1964), "Signals" (1970), and "Un Jour ou Deux" (1973). Each night new sections replace portions of the previous performance, so that the final evening is entirely different from the opening show. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Nov. 7-10 at 8, Nov. 11 at 2 and 8, and Nov. 12 at 2.)

PARSONS DANCE COMPANY
The choreographers David Parsons and Robert Battle present seventy-five minutes of works, including the company's strobe-lit signature work, "Caught," and "Strange Humors," a staged argument that takes the form of a tango. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. Nov. 10 at 7, Nov. 11 at 2 and 7, and Nov. 12 at noon and 5. Through Nov. 26.)

"REMEMBERING THE FUNKY CHICKEN"
The choreographers Tina Croll and Pat Catterson, both former Merce Cunningham dancers and L.A. expatriates, share a program, with "Belongings" and "Nine Lives," by Catterson, and "Balkan Landscape," by Croll, among other pieces. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Nov. 9-12 at 8:30.)

VERIKOVA UKRAINIAN NATIONAL DANCE COMPANY
The seventy-five-member troupe, made up of dancers, singers, and musicians, presents folk dances from its homeland, including "Don't Float, Little Swan," about a young girl's love, and "Baida," based on a poem about national heroes who faced death disdainfully. (Lehman College Concert Hall, 250 Bedford Park Blvd., the Bronx. 718-960-8833. Nov. 12 at 2.)

"GYPSY FLAMENCO!"
A split bill, with Andalusian dance from Concha Vargas and traditional flamenco music sung by La Macanita (Tomasa Guerrero Carrasco). (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400. Nov. 10-11 at 8.)

"PEARL RIVER"
The choreographers Stacy Dawson and David Neumann mix chop-socky fight sequences with the stylized movement of Chinese Opera in a series of duets set to the soundtrack for Jackie Chan's "Spiritual Kung Fu." (P.S. 1, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. Nov. 10-11 at 10:30 and Nov. 12 at 8. Through Nov. 26.)

JODY SPERLING/TIME LAPSE DANCE
The choreographer draws on historical sources for an evening that includes two works created in homage to the former Gaiety Girl Loie Fuller, whose dances, often created with theatrical manipulations of swaths of flowing material that floated around her, inspired Isadora Duncan. Sperling offers "The Magic Lantern Dance," with images projected onto her billowing skirts, and "Serpentine Dance," in which the movement of the skirt creates nearly sculptural forms. (Merce Cunningham Studio, 55 Bethune St. 924-0077. Nov. 10 at 9 and Nov. 11-12 at 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

MACY GRAY
She may have been voted the most fashionable female artist at the recent VH-1/*Vogue* Fashion Awards, but there's nothing particularly trendy about Gray's highly memorable talent. Like a time traveller from the classic-soul era of the early seventies, this helium-voiced R. & B. sensation has heavy-duty heart, and her taste for bell-bottom vamps makes her sound alarmingly like Al Green's long-lost little sister. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. Nov. 8 at 8.)

"HIGHLIGHTS IN JAZZ"
The clarinettist **Buddy DeFranco** and the vibraphonist **Terry Gibbs** came up in an age when you might have found yourself battling it out with such leviathans as Art Tatum or Charlie Parker. Both men still have a competitive edge and their exceptional chops, but it's their inner reserve of swing-to-bop lyricism which makes their individual playing, as well as their partnership, so rewarding. (Pace Downtown Theatre, Spruce St. between Nassau and Gold Sts. 346-1715. Nov. 9 at 8.)

SOLAS
Led by the American-born but Irish-raised multi-instrumentalist (tin whistle, banjo, fiddle) Seamus Egan, Solas has become one of the most acclaimed bands on the contemporary Celtic-music scene. Egan's broad experience (he's performed with everyone from Ralph Stanley to Vernon Reid) and his band members' virtuosity (the latest addition is the All Ireland champion vocalist Deirdre Scanlan) keep the music as bracing as a neat shot of Bushmills. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400. Nov. 9 at 8.)

"JAZZ AT THE PENTHOUSE"
A night of duets with the pianist **Cedar Walton** and the bassist **Buster Williams.** As the foremost utility players in New York City, they must have crossed paths hundreds of times over the past three decades. Even if they only stick to Walton's excellent, undervalued compositions, the evening will satisfy. (Kaplan Penthouse, Rose Building, 165 W. 65th St. 721-6500. Nov. 9-11 at 8.)

MICHEL LEGRAND
Having written the score for "The Umbrellas of Cherbourg" and such piano-bar standards as "Theme from the Summer of '42" and "What Are You Doing the Rest of Your Life," France's most famous modern romantic composer doesn't have to worry about where the next rent check is coming from. But his jazz credits are also solid—Miles

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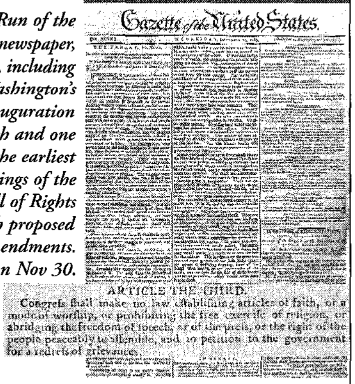

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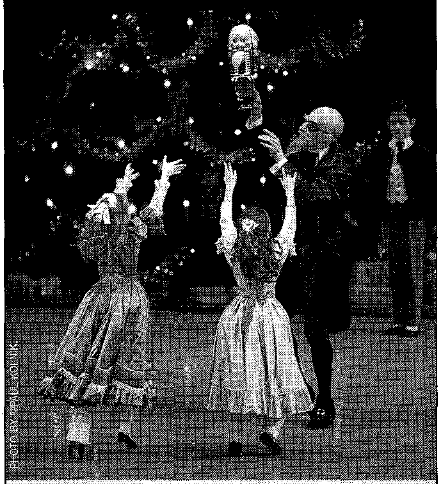

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Davis, John Coltrane, and Bill Evans were guests on the 1958 album "Legrand Jazz," and such contemporary heavyweights as Ron Carter and Grady Tate have been willing sidemen. The bassist **John Patitucci** and the drummer **Billy Drummond** provide the support. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 355-6160. Nov. 9-10 at 8.)

KEB' MO'
Mo' is a Grammy-winning acoustic-blues throwback who was once a fusion guitarist called Kevin Moore. His fine new album, "The Door," successfully bridges the distance between his music's past and its future. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. Nov. 11 at 8.)

STEP RIDEAU
This thirty-two-year-old zydeco bandleader grew up in Lebeau, Louisiana, listening to the legendary Rockin' Sydney (of "Don't Mess with My Toot, Toot" fame), but it wasn't until six years ago that he gave up a steady paycheck as a Houston construction worker and started playing the accordion professionally. He's been making up for lost time ever since, with four albums that mix the sounds of his youth and the sounds of the big city to great effect. (La Belle Époque, 827 Broadway, at 13th St. For more information, call 685-7597. Nov. 12 at 7.)

FOO FIGHTERS
Five years and three albums after he traded the drum kit for the spotlight, Dave Grohl has finally shaken the spectre of Nirvana and the long shadow of former bandmate Kurt Cobain. A legitimate if unremarkable rock songwriter, Grohl can deliver strong melodies with passion, as the Foo Fighters' latest album, the underrated "There Is Nothing Left to Lose," aptly demonstrates. With **Queens of the Stone Age**, who make guitar rock safe for the new millennium by leavening their power chords with the occasional steel drum. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. Nov. 12 at 8.)

"JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER"
Putting its money where its collective mouth is, the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra takes on the music of Louis Armstrong. The natural majesty of the great one is unobtainable by other humans, but after steeping themselves in all things Satchmo since they united as an orchestra, **Wynton Marsalis** and his crew are prepared for the daunting task. The pianist **Dr. John** and the saxophonist **Illinois Jacquet** will lend a hand. (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500. Nov. 13 at 7:30.)

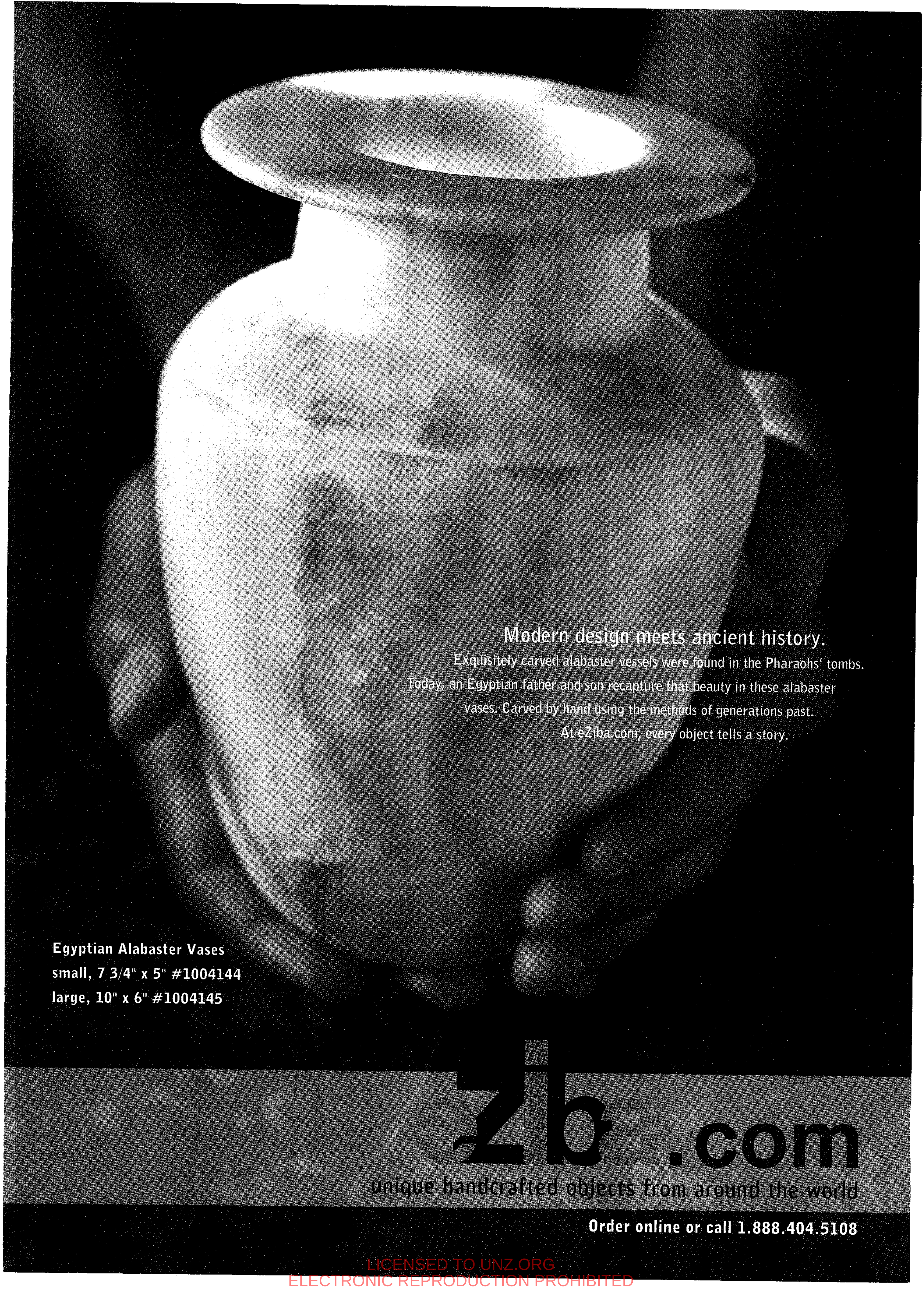
CELIA CRUZ
With Tito Puente gone, the indomitable vocalist Cruz is our living embodiment of Latin music, New York-style. Cruz can hit a stage like a contained hurricane, filling the room with a life force that thumbs its nose at her seventy-six years. She's supported by Puente's crack orchestra and the saxophone and clarinet virtuoso **Paquito D'Rivera.** (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Nov. 13 at 8.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
243 W. 42nd St. (997-4144)—Nov. 9: The W. C. Handy All Stars tour assembles the soulful vocalist **Little Milton,** the inspiring pianist **Johnnie Johnson** (Chuck Berry was so taken by his playing that he wrote "Johnnie B. Goode" for him), the Choctaw singer and harp player **Charlie Musselwhite,** the versatile guitarist **Duke Robillard,** and the Houston singer **Trudy Lynn.** Nov. 10-11: Soul Brother No. 1, **James Brown.**

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Nov. 9: **They Might Be Giants** perform material from their long-running Dial-a-Song service, which can be reached at 718-387-6962. Nov. 11: With his Cubist cheekbones and suitably Dionysian mane, **Richard Ashcroft** could have easily been the biggest English rock star in America since Mick Jagger. As the lead singer for the Verve, Ashcroft was a prefab golden god



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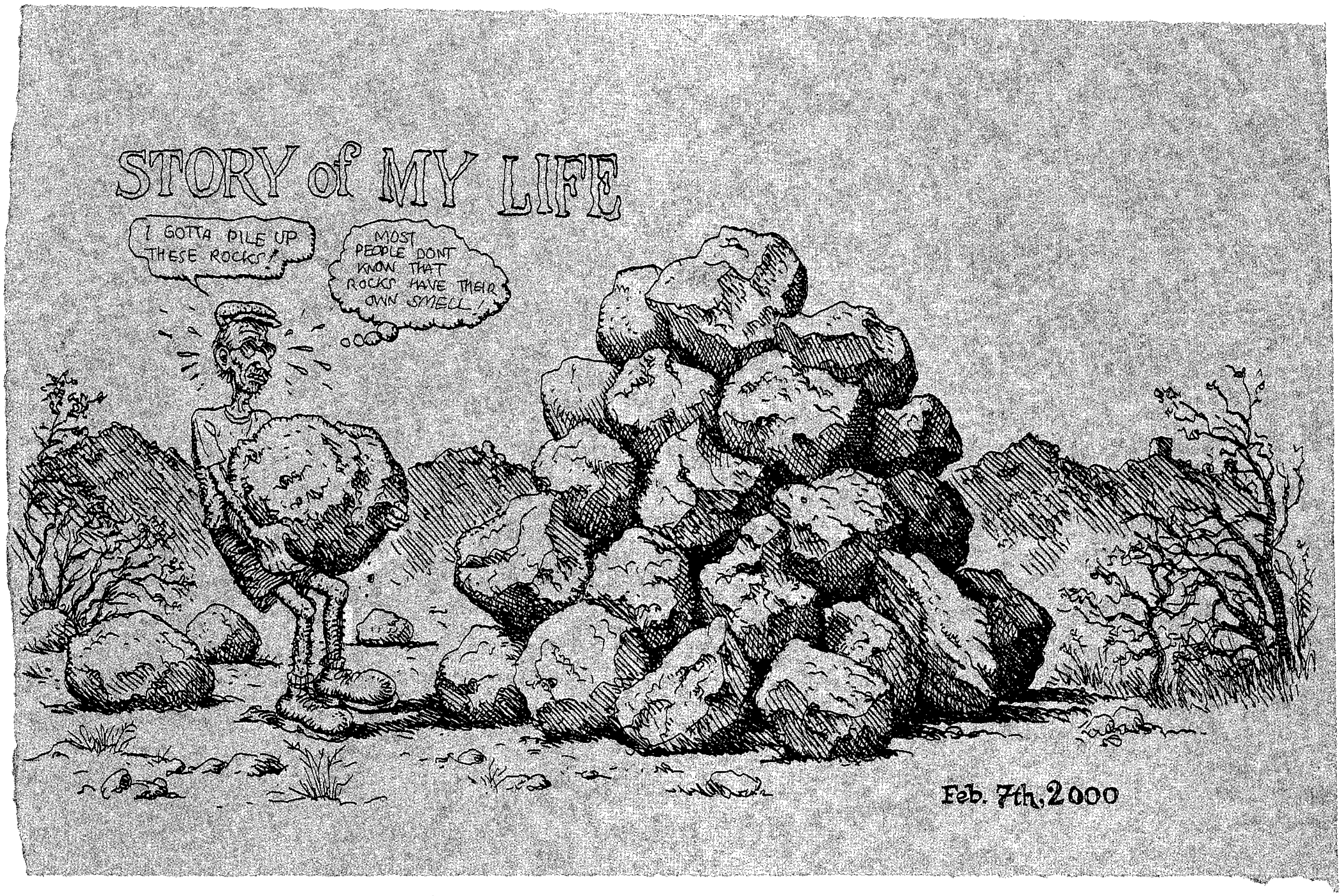
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MOST PEOPLE DONT KNOW THAT ROCKS HAVE THEIR OWN SMELL!
Feb. 7th, 2000

A selection from an exhibition of drawings done on restaurant placemats, by R. Crumb, at Morris.

whose flair for eccentric behavior earned him the nickname Mad Richard at home and a moderate amount of fame worldwide, thanks in large part to the epic single "Bittersweet Symphony" (which sampled an orchestral rendition of the Rolling Stones' "The Last Time"). But unlike Jagger, Ashcroft took his potential as a solo artist seriously, and broke up the band before it could really dig in. With his new release, "Alone with Everybody," Ashcroft has turned in a shamanic, neo-psychedelic opus that suggests that the Verve brought out only a fraction of his talent. Nov. 13-14: Top-shelf Americana from Minneapolis's **Jayhawks.**

FEZ
380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—Nov. 11: A visit from the Los Angeles singer-songwriter **Eleni Mandell** is a real treat. Perhaps the best unsigned musician in the business, Mandell was weaned on artists like Tom Waits and X, and her dark and sexy songs have been compared to those of everyone from Chan Marshall to Patsy Cline. Her latest self-produced album is titled "Thrill." Talk about truth in advertising. The **Mingus Big Band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—Nov. 9: The **Tom Tom Club.** The former Talking Heads husband-and-wife rhythm section, Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth, return with songs from "The Good the Bad and the Funky," their first album in eight years. This tropical-themed venue is ideal for the show; the new record is ripe with reggae influences, making their irresistible dance music more fun and potent than ever. Dining.

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (358-7503)—Nov. 11: **Big Lazy,** the elegantly gritty instrumental trio led by the extraordinary guitarist Stephen Ulrich. The band, which was known as Lazy Boy until it changed its name under pressure from the La-Z-Boy corporation, plays beautiful music that evokes everything from truckers' romps to the haunting film scores of Bernard Herrmann.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Nov. 12: **Johnny Griffin** and **Mark Turner.** After blazing his way across Europe most of the year, Griffin, the world's greatest bop tenor saxophonist, swoops into New York for a hot second, scares the pants off his fellow saxmen, and then flits off again while they try to recuperate. While in these parts, he surrounds himself with able young players and makes them work for every penny they earn. Reconciling the influences of polar-opposite tenor saxophonists John Coltrane and Warne Marsh is but one of the more impressive accomplishments of Turner, who is the most mature and aesthetically satisfying tenorist among the current lot of youngish players. Dining.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and **Bobby Short.** ♦ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **Barbara Carroll** is in attendance.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (339-4095)—**Barbara Cook** is in command of this urbane dinner-and-music room through Nov. 25. Her voice remains almost defiantly that of the nineteen-fifties Broadway ingénue, and her material is as winning as a gardenia corsage. Dining.

IRIDIUM
48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through Nov. 12: The **Bobby Hutcherson** quartet. It took Hutcherson to translate the modernist grammar of sixties jazz onto the vibraphone. He's at his best when he glides into the spare, mysterious ruminations he perfected on classics like Eric Dolphy's "Out to Lunch," but he also loves to display his piston-mallet technique on up-tempo chargers. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Through Nov. 12: **Winard Harper,** a drummer whose presence is synonymous with rhythmic sophistication, stops by with his sextet, featuring the engaging touch of the blues singer **Carrie Smith** and the earthy trombonist **Wycliffe Gordon.** Dining.

RUE B
188 Avenue B (358-1700)—**Joel Forrester,** the maestro of the wonderful People Like Us ensemble, remains a most agreeably eclectic pianist, and among the most undervalued of jazz composers. The sheer pleasure he brings to a panoply of styles, and to the individual way he absorbs them all, denotes comfort rather than scholarly erudition. He's enthroned here at the keyboard Monday nights in November.

SWEET BASIL
88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—Through Nov. 12: The **Avashai Cohen Group.** Chick Corea's outstanding band Origin gets its hundred-horsepower drive and cross-current motion from a rhythm section that includes Cohen on bass. He's an invigorating player, as prone to slapping the sides of his instrument for rhythmic emphasis as he is to stroking ambrosial melodies from its strings. Cohen, an Israeli citizen, gleefully brings world-music elements and unlikely instruments like the oud into his own ensembles. He's a player bursting with ideas. Dining.

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (358-7503)—Nov. 10-11: **Dave Douglas's** latest band, Charms of the Night Sky, deserves its evocative and exotic moniker. Mating accordion, bass, and violin with the leader's trumpet, this enchanting chamber group incorporates a variety of genres—klezmer, classical, avant jazz, pop (they do a killer version of "Goldfinger")—which results in mysterious and wholly satisfying music. Douglas has a working band for every day of the week, but this one releases the poet in him.

UP OVER JAZZ CAFÉ
351 Flatbush Ave., at Seventh Ave., Brooklyn (718-398-5413)—Nov. 10-11: The **Benny Powell**

quintet. Trombonists bred in big bands the way Powell was aren't to be taken lightly. Having come up with Count Basie, Powell knows the value of clarity and the majestic force of the blues.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Nov. 12: The **Stefon Harris** quintet. It's been a while since the vibraphone had a bright new champion, but Harris has come to the rescue. A skittery yet increasingly mature approach to his instrument and a close association with such jazz upstarts as **Jacky Terrasson** (on piano here) give Harris a welcome edge. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—**"The Year One: Art of the Ancient World East and West,"** a selection of antiquities from the permanent collection, all of which were created around 1 A.D. Through Jan. 14. ♦ **"Art and the Empire City"** presents paintings, photographs, and decorative art from one of New York's early periods of irrational exuberance, between the completion of the Erie Canal, in 1825, and the beginning of the Civil War, in 1861. Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"The Golden Deer of Eurasia: Scythian and Sarmatian Treasures from the Russian Steppes."** Through Feb. 4. ♦ **"The Divine Comtesse"** presents photographs, by Pierre-Louis Pierson, of the Countess de Castiglione (1837-99). Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"Queen Victoria and Thomas Sully"** gathers the oil portraits, oil sketches, drawings, and other ephemera connected with the preparation of the full-length portrait (also on view) by Sully, the British-born Philadelphia artist. Through Dec. 31. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—**"Open Ends,"** the third and final installment of **"MOMA 2000,"** the yearlong exhibition devoted to the art of the past century, covers art from 1960 to the present. Like its predecessors, the current show is divided into segments; this first one includes several large-scale works and installations, by Cai Guo-Qiang, James Rosenquist, Pipilotti Rist, Cindy Sherman, and Gerhard Richter, which suggest the themes that the later segments amplify. Through Jan. 2. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—One design icon salutes another: the museum devotes its spiralling Frank Lloyd Wright spaces to an exhibition that measures the impact of Giorgio Armani, the original relaxed-fit couturier. Through Jan. 10. ♦ **"Amazons of the Avant-Garde"** is a modest survey of six women painters, each of whom played a vital role in the evolution of the Russian jeunesse dorée. Through Jan. 7. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Edward Steichen began as a pictorialist, photographing the sweet and fuzzy scenes fashionable in the first decades of the twentieth century—it's tough to tell the early prints in this retrospective from his smudgy pastel paintings of the same era. Later, he began experimenting with sharper focus and stronger lines, turning still-lifes of vegetables into stark modernist abstractions, and he came to see photography as a way to make a strong and immediate impression. Not coincidentally, his commercial work for magazines and advertisements became highly salable. Steichen's celebrity portraits—of Garbo and Dietrich for *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*—still look contemporary. When he gave up such work, famous and financially secure but estranged from many of the noncommercial artists he'd known in the past, he took over the direction of MOMA's nascent photography department. Even there, he couldn't shake his popular touch: his blockbuster overview of the medium, "The Family of Man," which is nicely documented here, travelled for ten years and sold millions of catalogues. Through Feb. 4. ♦ **"Roni Horn: Still Water (The River Thames, for Example), 1999."** Through Jan. 14. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—**"Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga"** marks the millennial anniversary of the Viking North American landing with an exhibition of such artifacts as graffiti, plunder, a reconstructed longboat, and a Norse penny, and a variety of dioramas. Through Jan. 21. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—A retrospective devoted to Lee Krasner ends its national tour in the artist's birthplace. Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Hip-Hop Nation: Roots, Rhymes, and Rage"** presents videos, clothing and accessories, manuscripts of lyrics, F.B.I. letters, magazine covers, and installations that catalogue reactions to the genre. Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"Gold of the Nomads: Scythian Treasures from Ancient Ukraine."** Through Jan. 21. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

GROLIER CLUB
47 E. 60th St. (838-6690)—To mark the centennial of the birth of the versatile illustrator Fritz Kredel, the Grolier Club has mounted a charming show of watercolors, ink drawings, and woodcuts, not to mention the occasional carved puppet. When the artist immigrated to America, in 1938, he immediately found work with publishers like Random House, Hallmark, and the *Reader's Digest*. The images here range from illustrations of fairy tales and children's stories (some still in print) to political cartoons (a pompous Charles de Gaulle as the Sun King) to a woodcut commissioned for John F. Kennedy's inauguration. Through Nov. 18. (Open daily, except Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. (869-8089)—**"Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World"** brings together more than five hundred and fifty volumes, prints, broadsides, and first editions, including one of Thomas More's "Utopia," from which the concept and the show take their names. Proposed alternative worlds tend to reflect the problems of their era, but some suggestions appear timeless—Plato wonders if he can successfully banish lawsuits from his Republic, and Christine de Pisan dreams up a lavishly illustrated "Cité des Dames." The show's indisputable star is one of three known original copies of the Declaration of Independence, which appears at just the right place in the historical progression to counteract a roomful of woozy accounts of early contact with the New World's noble savages. Jefferson's strong words about tyranny are still awe inspiring, particularly in the original handwriting. But after that the show pulls up short, closing with some faded Communist propaganda and a shelf of non-threatening paperbacks. Through Jan. 27. (Open Mondays, and Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 7:30.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

ART DOMANTAY / KORI NEWKIRK
One of the liveliest galleries around is not in Soho, Chelsea, or even Williamsburg. The Project, a split-level Harlem gallery, has achieved cult status among curators and collectors since it opened just two seasons ago, for, among other coups, launching the career of Paul Pfeiffer, the first recipient of the Whitney's Buxbaum Award. This time out, the gallery showcases two other young artists.

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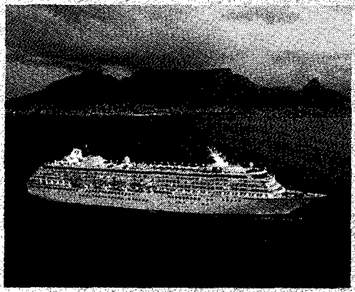

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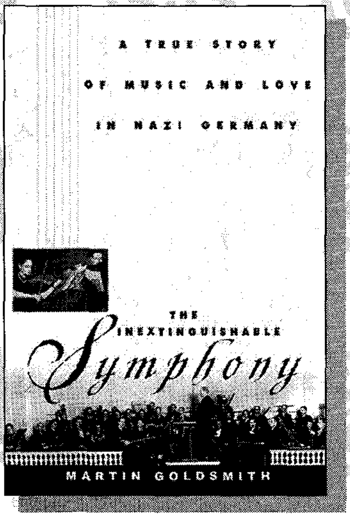

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Domantay gives playing with your food a good name in a floor piece that snakes around a corner made of what appears to be plaster. In fact, it's sheet cake topped with white icing, a baked-goods version of a Lynda Benglis spill. Upstairs, Newkirk makes beautiful and sometimes racially loaded allusions to domestic arts from decorating to hairdressing, in a group of "curtain paintings"—moody landscapes made of strands of pony beads strung on artificial hair. Through Nov. 12. (427 W. 126th St. 662-8610.)

BILL VIOLA
You may think you've stumbled on a poorly lit painting show, but the frames on view feature the latest work of the pioneering video artist. Shot on high-speed film and displayed at vastly reduced rates—in one case it takes nearly an hour and a half for a single minute to pass—this series of portraits depicts actors in the throes of four passions: joy, anger, sorrow, fear. For all its technical wizardry and lush visuals, the project is too conceptually close to Bruce Nauman's seminal "Good Boy, Bad Boy" video, which also explored emotional range but with more affecting results. Through Nov. 25. (James Cohan, 41 W. 57th St. 755-7171.)

Short List

R. B. KITAJ
Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St.
541-4900. Through Dec. 2.

FRANK STELLA
Mathes, 41 E. 57th St. 752-5135.
Through Dec. 22.

TABITHA VEVERS
Kraushaar, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.
307-5730. Through Nov. 11.

TOM WESSELMAN
Helman, 20 W. 57th St. 245-2888.
Through Dec. 9.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

R. CRUMB
Drawings executed on placemats at restaurants where the artist ate in France. Through Dec. 9. (Morris, 465 W. 23rd St. 727-2752.)

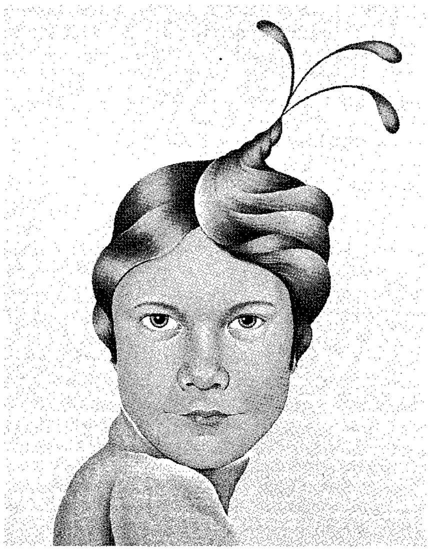
AL HELD
With heroic conviction and energy, Held continues to paint enormous visions of a geometric wonderland. In the twenty-foot-long "Aperture IV," we stare past a constellation of purple monoliths and spheres toward a glowing Euclidean infinity. In "Blue Wave," Held introduces an irregular rippling shape, mantled (as nearly every form in these paintings is) in gaudy checkerboard patterns. One searches in vain for some new light here, but Held's rigorous, intricate works keep looking like a turbocharged version of Vasarely's moiré effects. Through Nov. 25. (Robert Miller, 524 W. 26th St. 366-4774.)

BLAKE RAYNE
"Winter Line," the latest in a planned group of seasonal exhibitions, shares the spare, vaguely portentous good looks of Rayne's earlier suite, "Autumn Drive," which was based on photographs taken from the driver's seat of a convertible. This time, the photographic concept is simpler: a few bare branches appear in each picture, backed by a blurry horizon. Without the expectation of narrative that enlivened the earlier work, one is left with little more than a laconic effect, mood music for the eyes. Through Nov. 18. (Greene Naftali, 526 W. 26th St. 463-7770.)

SCOTT RICHTER
As in his last show, two years ago, Richter creates massive piles of paint, like syrup-drenched pancake stacks. Glistening and tilting, they are at once lovely and ridiculous—ugly-duckling studio accidents that have yet to realize they are sculptural swans. Some of the paint mounds sit ponderously on tables; others hang improbably from the gallery wall. The show's centerpiece, "Corvette of My Heart," is a foot-thick, tongue-shaped, bright-red slab atop an equally red wheelbarrow. Like the best surrealist sculpture, it seems at once inexplicable and seductively macabre. Through Nov. 11. (Harris, 529 W. 20th St. 463-9666.)

ALEXIS ROCKMAN
Instead of prehistoric plants and bugs, Rockman's latest paintings feature himself and a group of his ecotourist friends on expedition in the Amazon. One has them posing, safari-style, standing atop the carcass of an enormous ground sloth. In another, Rockman is lifted into the air by a gigantic carnivorous plant as his buddies hack away at its tentacles with machetes. Rockman's earnest, meticulous style seems spectacularly ill suited to such tongue-in-cheek scenarios. Through Nov. 11. (Gorney, Bravin & Lee, 534 W. 26th St. 352-8372.)

SARAH SZE
With its fragile aerial constructions soaring from wall to wall, this show is an incitement to infatuation. Sze does amazing things with the most prosaic household materials—bureau drawers, window blinds, desk lamps, pushpins, and loose-leaf paper, including the tiny circles that pop out of a hole punch. The work feels simpler than her previous constructions, which have sometimes overdosed on miniature objects. Each new piece is essentially a demolished, reanimated version of a single article of furniture: a bed, a bureau, a chair. These familiar starting points give the sculptures an air of magical transformation. It's not often that an artist can reënergize a genre, but Sze makes site-specific installation look like an ecstatic proposition. Through Nov. 20. (Boesky, 535 W. 22nd St. 680-9889.)



"Creme Brulee," by Sean Mellyn, at the Jack Tilton /Anna Kustera gallery.

Short List

CARL ANDRE / ZOE LEONARD
Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105. Andre through Nov. 18; Leonard through Nov. 21.

DAMIEN HIRST
Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 741-1111.
Through Dec. 16.

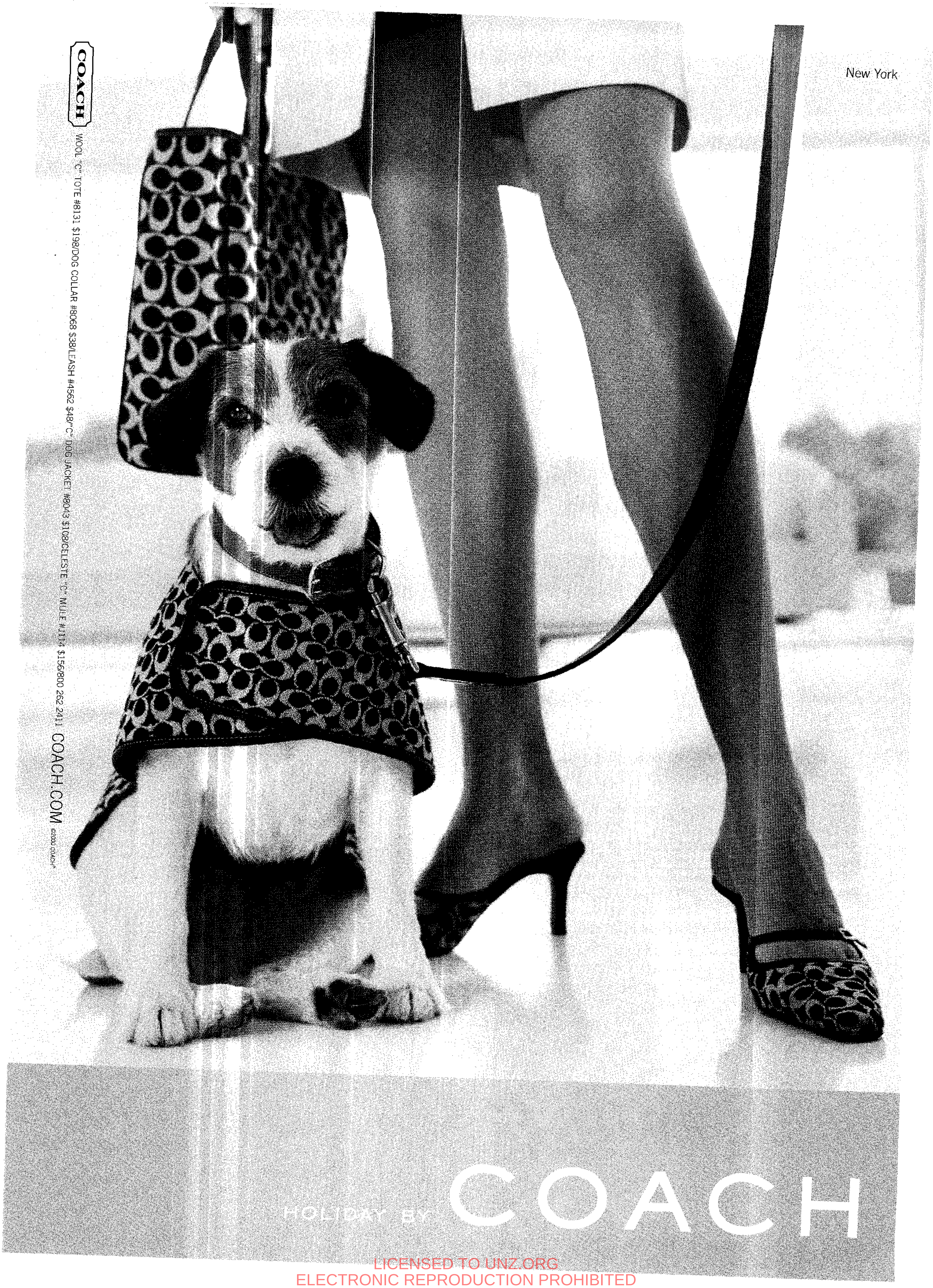
BEATRIZ MILHAZES
Thorp, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St.
691-6565. Through Nov. 25.

GERHARD RICHTER
Schoormans, 508 W. 26th St. 243-3159.
Through Nov. 25.

MATTHEW RITCHIE
Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 627-6000.
Through Nov. 25.

TONY TASSET
Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 929-0500.
Through Nov. 25.

ZHANG XIAOGANG
Protetch, 511 W. 22nd St. 633-6999.
Through Nov. 25.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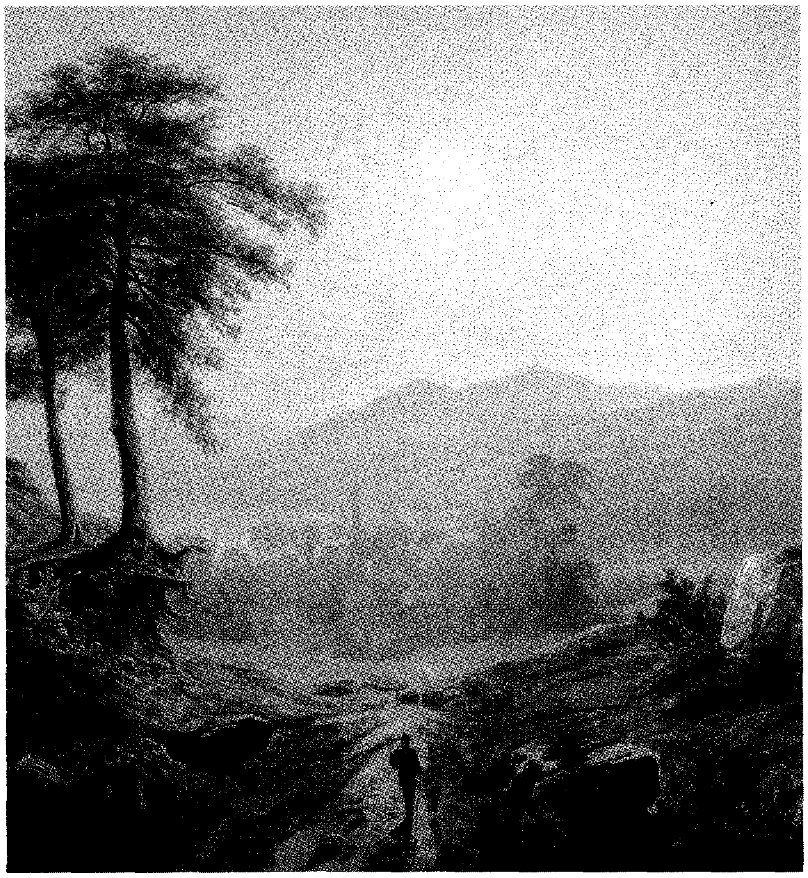

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GALLERIES–DOWNTOWN

SEAN MELLYN
Rosenquist meets Romper Room in slick paintings of rosy-cheeked children isolated against candy-colored backgrounds. Highlights include the creepy "Free Range," in which an impossibly blue-eyed, flaxen-haired tyke hovers over a nest of three eggs, one splitting open to reveal tufts of blond hair. The most ambitious piece in the show (which is not to say the most successful) enters the third dimension as a jumble of scary sculptural objects tumble from the forehead of a giant laughing baby. Through Nov. 25. (Tilton/Kustera, 49 Greene St. 941-1775.)

Short List

MARY ESCH
Bronwyn Keenan, 3 Crosby St. 431-5083.
Through Nov. 11.
DONALD JUDD
Wildenstein, 142 Greene St. 431-9224.
Through Nov. 11.
CHRIS HIEBERT
Kramarsky, 560 Broadway. 966-6601.
Through Nov. 11.
JASON RHOADES
Zwirner, 43 Greene St. 966-9074.
Through Nov. 18.

ONLY CONNECT

STRIP SHOW
Thomas Edison invented the light bulb, the movie projector, and the Sunday funnies. Well, not exactly. But Edison was the chief patron of Richard Felton Outcault, an Ohio-born artist hired by the Edison Laboratories in 1888, who moved to New York to work as an illustrator.

Many of Outcault's early drawings featured a mischievous young boy in an oversized white nightshirt. In 1896, the nightshirt began appearing in bright yellow, and Outcault's star—the Yellow Kid—was born. The character and the cartoonist rapidly became celebrities, so much so that when Outcault was lured from Joseph Pulitzer's New York *World* by William Randolph Hearst's New York *Journal,* Pulitzer hired another artist to draw the Kid. The fierce competition between the publishers gave rise to the term "yellow journalism." **The R. F. Outcault Society's Yellow Kid Web Site** (www.neponset.com/yellowkid/index.htm) provides samples of Outcault's earliest work, like the 1894 panel "Feudal Pride in Hogan's Alley," which delivers local color in black-and-white.

George Herriman created several strips (including "Major Ozone's Fresh Air Crusade" and "Baron Mooch") before striking gold with "Krazy Kat." Psychologically complex and intricately drawn, with a protagonist whose gender shifted opportunistically, "Krazy Kat" has inspired academic studies, novels, and even on-line tributes. Though the **Coconino County Home Page** (www.krazy.com/toc.htm) rehashes Herriman's life—including speculation on his racial background—its real draw is visual, in Herriman's beautiful command of desert hues. And the **Classic American Comic Strips Archives** (gographics.com/funnies/amstpidx.htm) reprints early landmarks, from E. C. Segar's "Thimble Theatre" (featuring Popeye the Sailor Man) to Winsor McCay's baroque, surreal "Little Nemo in Slumberland," in which children ride "night horses" and skip across the caps of giant mushrooms.

—*Ben Greenman*

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S
Nov. 9-10: A two-part auction of Impressionist and modern painting and sculpture, including Manet's "Jeune Fille dans un Jardin." ♦ Nov. 11: An auction of French and other Continental furniture, decorations, ceramics, and carpets. Lots include a large Berlin vase, circa 1838, the body painted with a panorama of Potsdam; a Louis XV clock from the mid-eighteenth century, housing a striking mechanism by Étienne Lenoir; and a set of six plates from the "Service des Roses" by Sèvres, circa 1820. ♦ Nov. 14: An auction of contemporary painting and sculpture, including works by Bacon, Calder, and Twombly. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

CHRISTIE'S
Nov. 8-9: Sales of Impressionist and modern paintings, sculptures, and works on paper, including works by Degas, Manet ("Pivoines dans une Bouteille,"a still-life from 1864), Monet, Matisse, Picasso ("Femme aux Bras Croisés," 1901-02), and Renoir. ♦ Nov. 10 at 2: Modern Japanese paintings, executed in both the Western and Japanese styles. ♦ Nov. 10 at 2:30: More Impressionist and modern works on paper, including items by Cézanne, Gauguin, Monet, Renoir, and Vlaminck. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.)

DOYLE
Nov. 14: An auction of twentieth-century painting, sculpture, furniture, and decorative art, including items by George Condo, Joan Mitchell, Isamu Noguchi, and Le Corbusier. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730.)

PHILLIPS
Nov. 13-14: A two-part sale of contemporary art, including works by Hirst, Judd, de Kooning, and Rauschenberg. (406 E. 79th St. 570-4830.)

SWANN
Nov. 9: A major auction of Old Master, nineteenth-century, and modern works on paper, including pieces by Bellows, Dürer, Kirchner, Nolde, Picasso, Redon, Stubbs, and Warhol. Lots include a complete "Jazz" portfolio (1947) by Henri Matisse. ♦ Nov. 13: An auction of travel posters from the eras of rail and steam. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710.)

MODERNISM
In its fifteenth year, the show continues to highlight decorative art, design, and photography from the period between 1880 and 1980. Seventy-five international dealers offer a range of items, including pieces from the Art Deco, Art Nouveau, and Wiener Werkstätte movements and many others. (Park Avenue Armory, Park Ave. at 67th St. 777-5218. Nov. 9-12.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

JITKA HANZLOVÁ
More than fifty of the color pictures shown here are three-quarter portraits of women of a wide range of ages, posed on the street in their own clothes, looking into the camera. The gallery describes Hanzlová as "cautiously" capturing the way her subjects represent themselves, but she shows less timidity than calculated, artistically profitable decorum, a delicacy that must serve her as well in introducing herself to potential models as it does in introducing them to viewers. Twenty similarly simple and direct landscapes, taken in the Belgian Ardennes, make up the balance of the show. Through Nov. 25. (Gasser & Grunert, 524 W. 19th St. 807-9494.)

ABELARDO MORELL
Morell's subjects—a bedroom, a door, a pencil, a book—are familiar, and his camera-obscura studies have been in circulation for years now, but his work continues to impress with a mixture of technical riddling and pure aesthetics. This small show includes a new set of his signature interiors with exterior views projected over them, offering transposed views of Paris, Italy, and New York. In "Sun Spots on Uncovered Table," an arbor creates

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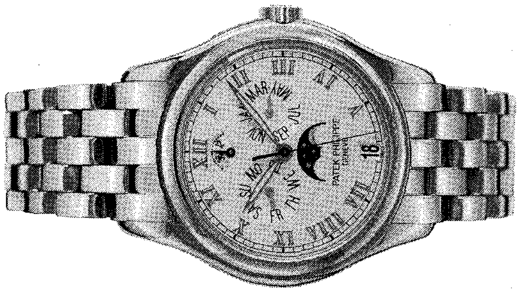

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shade and mimics the camera obscura, projecting dozens of images of the sun in an irregular polka-dot pattern. And in his simplest still-lifes dictionaries are made to look as monumental as blocks at Stonehenge. Through Dec. 2. (Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766.)

"APPLE TREES / SYNERGY"
These companion shows pair off two sets of artists—photographers John Szarkowski and Lee Friedlander in one room, and photographer Harry Callahan (1912-99) with painter Hugo Weber (1918-71) in the other. Szarkowski's perfect modernist photographs of trees, seen in their habitats and titled by their Latin names, are almost botanical documents, beside which Friedlander's square studies of apple branches look all the more abstract. Next door, the more ambitious pairing of Callahan's elegant photographs and Weber's gestural paintings follows from their meeting in 1946, when both joined the staff of the Chicago Institute of Design. The work they produced over the course of their friendship shows cross-fertilization—Weber picks up Callahan's delicate, reductive details, and Callahan absorbs Weber's abstract lines. Through Nov. 25. (Pace, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
I.C.P.'s redesigned midtown space, billed as the new Times Square's first museum, is now open, with three shows: Lorie Novak's "Collected Visions," Annie Leibovitz's "Women," and a survey of the Center's large permanent collection called "Reflections in a Glass Eye." Uptown, "Eugène Atget: The Pioneer" continues. The Museum Mile location will remain open through June, when its buyer, who plans to return the building to use as a private residence, takes over. (Uptown: 1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6. Midtown: 1166 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. 860-1777. Open Mondays through Wednesdays, 10-5; Thursdays and Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

ANDREW BUSH
Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 431-0147.
Through Dec. 12.

LUCINDA DEVLIN
Rodgers, 529 W. 20th St. 414-9810.
Through Dec. 16.

SCOTT PETERMAN
Silverstein, 520 W. 21st St. 929-4300.
Through Nov. 11.

CINDY SHERMAN
Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 206-7100.
Opening Nov. 11.

W. EUGENE SMITH
Klotz, 22 E. 72nd St. 327-2211.
Through Nov. 18.

EDWARD STEICHEN
Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010.
Through Dec. 2.

EDWARD STEICHEN
Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. 966-6223.
Through Dec. 30.

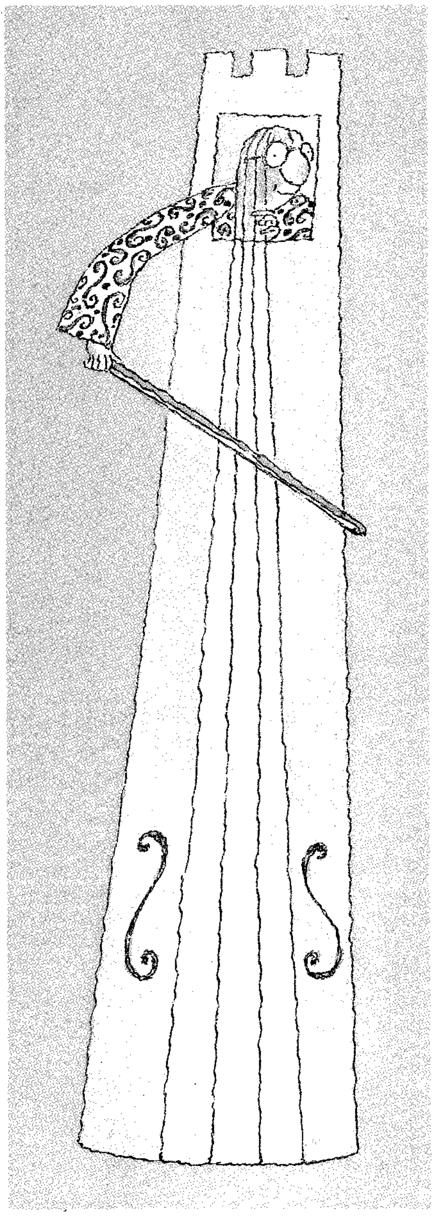
See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney Museum.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
"Carmen," with Olga Borodina and René Pape, and Roberto Alagna in the role of Don José; conducted by Bertrand de Billy. (Nov. 8 at 8.) ♦ With Neil Shicoff replacing Mr. Alagna. (Nov. 11 at 1:30.) ♦ **"Turandot,"** with Jane Eaglen, Angela Gheorghiu, Richard Margison, and Robert Lloyd; Marco Armiliato. (Nov. 9 at 8.) ♦ With Ms. Eaglen, Hei-Kyung Hong, Dennis O'Neill, and Paul Plishka; Mr. Armiliato. (Nov. 13 at 8.) ♦ **"La Bohème,"** with Cristina Gallardo-Domas, Sondra Radvanovsky, Marcello Giordani, and Jean-Luc Chaignaud; Mr. Armiliato. (Nov. 10 and Nov. 14 at 8.) ♦ **"Die Zauberflöte,"** with Angela Maria Blasi, Mary Dunleavy, Michael Schade, and Gerald Finley; Sebastian Weigle. (Nov. 11 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
"Madama Butterfly," with Liping Zhang, Elizabeth Batton, David Corman, and John Hancock; conducted by Brent McMunn. (Nov. 8 at 7:30 and Nov. 11 at 1:30.) ♦ The company's new production of Handel's **"Rinaldo"** continues its run, with Christine Goerke and Lisa Saffer, and countertenor David Daniels in the title role; Harry Bicket. (Nov. 9 at 7:30 and Nov. 12 at 1:30.) ♦ **"Le Nozze di Figaro,"** with Cynthia Clayton, Kathleen Brett, George Cordes, and Jake Gardner; Steven Mosteller. (Nov. 10 at 8.) ♦ A new production of Verdi's **"Rigoletto,"** with Christina Bouras, Gaétan Laperrière, Michael Didyk, and Peter Volpe; George Manahan. (Nov. 11 at 8 and Nov. 14 at 7:30.) (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)



Jon Deak's "Rapunzel," at Merkin Hall.

VICTORIA ROBERTS

AMATO OPERA COMPANY
The company continues its run of Verdi's "Il Trovatore." (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 228-8200. Nov. 11 at 7:30 and Nov. 12 at 2:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
With music director Kurt Masur still out for minor surgery (he is due to return the week of Dec. 14), guest conductors continue to fill in; this week it's Christoph Eschenbach, the newly appointed music director of the Chicago Symphony's summer Ravinia Festival. Eschenbach conducts the German classics with both imagination and strength: think Dimitri Mitropoulos to Masur's Fritz Reiner. Brahms's stormy, neo-Baroque Double Concerto features Glenn Dicterow, the orchestra's concertmaster, and its principal cellist, Carter Brey; Dvořák's Symphony No. 9 ("From the New World") completes the program. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Nov. 9 at 8, Nov. 10 at 2, and Nov. 14 at 7:30.)

BROOKLYN PHILHARMONIC
The orchestra helps Music from Japan celebrate its twenty-fifth anniversary with four American premières, and the world première of Karen Tanaka's "Guardian Angel." (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Nov. 9 at 8.)

MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC SYMPHONY
George Manahan leads the student group in Webern's iridescent orchestration of the ricercar from Bach's "Musical Offering," Walton's darkly lyrical Viola Concerto (with soloist Jethro Marks), and Bruckner's Symphony No. 6. (Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St. Nov. 10 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

CANTORI NEW YORK
Most choral groups shy away from new and challenging music, but the Cantori seem to take it in stride. Their season-opener mix includes the arch-modern (a Missa Brevis by Henri Pousseur), the tried and true (Vaughan Williams's "Three Shakespeare Songs"), the out of the way (Wolf's "Six Sacred Songs"), and a New York première (Tom Cipullo's "Meeting at Night"). (West Park Presbyterian Church, 165 W. 86th St. 439-4758. Nov. 11 at 8.)

JUPITER SYMPHONY
An all-Grieg program featuring the Piano Concerto (with the fine American soloist William Wolfram), the "Peer Gynt" Suite No. 2, and the melodrama "Bergliot," a treatment of a Norwegian saga which Grieg considered one of his best pieces. Martin Bookspan serves as narrator. (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. 799-1259. Nov. 13 at 2 and 7 and Nov. 14 at 8.)

PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA
Music director Wolfgang Sawallisch leads a showpiece program of Dukas ("The Sorcerer's Apprentice"), Mozart (the Symphony No. 40), and Mussorgsky ("Pictures at an Exhibition"). (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Nov. 14 at 8.)

RECITALS

ANDRAS SCHIFF
Schiff—a pianist of stamina and elegance who likes to present long programs—concludes his three-concert series of Bach recitals. Nov. 8 at 7:30: Book II of "The Well-Tempered Clavier." ♦ Nov. 11 at 7:30: The Goldberg Variations. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800.)

AXEL STRAUSS
In a recital sponsored by the Naumberg Foundation, the violinist (who won the Foundation's 1998 International Violin Competition) appears with the pianist Anton Nel (in music by Bach and Enescu) and with Mr. Nel and the Lark String Quartet (in Chausson's Concerto for Violin, String Quartet, and Piano). (Nov. 8 at 8. Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050.)

MARLBORO MUSIC FESTIVAL
The legendary Vermont music school and festival, founded by Rudolf Serkin, celebrated its fiftieth anniversary this summer, but the party continues locally with two special concerts. Nov. 8 at 8: A program of Beethoven, Mozart, Webern, and Leon Kirchner (his Trio No. 1 for Piano and Strings), with the pianists Jonathan Biss and Mitsuko Uchida, the violist Samuel Rhodes, and friends. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd

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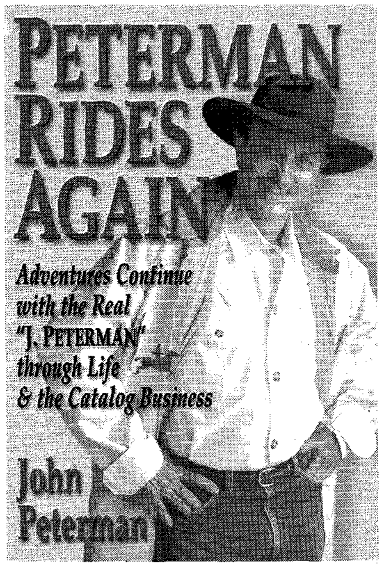
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St. 570-3949.) ♦ Nov. 10 at 8: Marlboro's artistic directors—Ms. Uchida and the pianist Richard Goode—perform Bach's Concerto No. 2 for Two Pianos, with the Marlboro Festival Orchestra conducted by Isidore Cohen; Dvořák's Woodwind Serenade and Mendelssohn's Octet for Strings complete the program. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800.)

RUTH LAREDO / ST. LAWRENCE STRING QUARTET

Both Ms. Laredo and the young Canadian group are passionate and idiomatic advocates of the Romantic repertory. Ms. Laredo goes it alone in Schubert's Impromptu in G-Flat Major, as does the St. Lawrence in Mendelssohn's Quartet in A Minor; they team up for the Piano Quintet by Schumann. (Metropolitan Museum. 570-3949. Nov. 10 at 7.)

BACHMANN-KLIBONOFF-FRIDMAN TRIO

The piano trio (and friends) present the first of six concerts that will explore the music and influence of Beethoven; this one will feature Mendelssohn's Piano Quartet No. 2, Beethoven's first Piano Trio (Op. 1, No. 1), and the piano-trio version of his Septet. (Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St. 685-0008, ext. 357. Nov. 10 at 7.)

DREW MINTER

In "As the Days Darken: An Autumn Program of Medieval Songs," the countertenor offers selections from the work of such troubadours and minnesingers as Peire d'Avernhe and Wolfgang von Eschenbach, accompanying himself on several harps modelled on examples seen in the paintings of the fifteenth-century artist Hans Memling. (Church of St. Luke in the Fields, 487 Hudson St. 633-2167. Nov. 11 at 8.)

AN DIE MUSIK

The ensemble opens its twenty-fifth season with two new works—the belated New York première of Kodály's 1905 Intermezzo for String Trio and the world première of Jon Deak's "Rapunzel"—along with music by Haydn, Beethoven, and Brahms. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Nov. 12 at 4.)

HENSCHEL QUARTET

The young German string ensemble makes its New York début in quartets by Mozart (in G Major, K. 387), Janáček (the "Kreutzer Sonata," based on Tolstoy's novel), and Mendelssohn (the anguished F-Minor Quartet). (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 288-0700. Nov. 12 at 5.)

SPECULUM MUSICAE

The ensemble, celebrating its thirtieth anniversary, is renowned for its devotion to the most intimidating modern scores; in the final concert of this year's Sonic Boom Festival, it presents an overview of three decades of music for acoustic and electronic instruments, including a rare performance of Karlheinz Stockhausen's classic "Mantra" and music by Tod Machover and Martin Matalon. (Great Hall, Cooper Union, Third Ave. at 7th St. 279-4200. Nov. 13 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

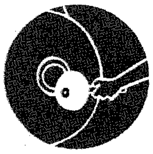
NEIGHBORHOOD MOVES

C. K. Chu has been spending his evenings around Times Square for the past twenty-seven years making people breathe heavily, sweat a lot, and generally feel much better. Chu is a master of the Chinese martial art Tai Chi and its companion regenerative exercise system, *nei kung*, and he's taught New Yorkers from his Tai Chi Chuan Center of New York, on Forty-third Street, since Nixon was in office. The area's real-estate boom has finally caught up with Chu, and he is moving his school to a new location, around the corner. To help raise money for renovations, the Hong Kong-born sexagenarian is giving a rare public demonstration of classic Tai Chi, in an evening that also includes sword fighting and musical interpretations of centuries-old Chinese texts. (Pace Downtown Theatre, Spruce St. between Nassau and Gold Sts. Nov. 11 at 7:30. For more information, call 221-6110.)

READINGS

Nov. 8 at 7: By Malachy McCourt, from his memoir "Singing My Him Song." (BookCourt, 163 Court St., Brooklyn. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Nov. 9 at 6:30: By the playwright Eric Bogosian and the poet Rigoberto Gonzalez, from their work. (Memorial Hall, Pratt Institute, 200 Willoughby Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-3570.) ♦ Nov. 10 at 7: By the poet Jorie Graham. (Russian Samovar, 256 W. 52nd St. Tickets at the door.) ♦ Nov. 13 at 7:30: By the poets Alice Notley, Anselm Berrigan, and Edmund Berrigan. (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Nov. 14 at 8: By Alec Wilkinson and Gerrit Graham and other actors, from Wilkinson's 1993 *New Yorker* piece "The Confession." (The Half King, 505 W. 23rd St. No tickets necessary.)

MUSIC NOTES



RARE AIR

Fine as some of Leonard Bernstein's studio recordings are, it was always more exciting to hear him live, not only for the electricity of his presence but for the unpredictability of his interpretations. Now the New York Philharmonic, under its Special Editions label, has released a new ten-disk set, **"Bernstein Live,"** high-quality remastered Philharmonic radio-broadcast tapes that span from 1951 to 1981 and cover a range of repertory from Bach to Boulez. (Priced close to $200, it also includes two lavish booklets full of interviews, essays, photographs, and program notes.) If the conservative programming of the orchestra's current regime has left you starved for the new and unusual, then this will be an invigorating change.

Bernstein's performances of the standard repertory can be problematic—he seems unable to understand the peculiar, repressed passion of Elgar's "Cockaigne" Overture, for example—but he can succeed wonderfully, and unexpectedly, as in Bruckner's Sixth Symphony, Beethoven's Triple Concerto, and a generous selection of scenes from "Götterdämmerung."

It is in the newer music, however, that Bernstein is at his most essential; while he chafes a bit at the sheer complexity of a piece like Xenakis' "Pithoprakta," he revels in the folkish eclecticism of Ives's Second Symphony—the same world-première performance of 1951 that Ives, too overwhelmed to come to Carnegie Hall, heard on the radio. The slashing physicality Bernstein brings to the fast parts of Stravinsky's "Song of the Nightingale," in which he gobbles up the space between the beats like a greedy child, has a perverse and thrilling edge. And a 1958 performance of Webern's "Six Pieces for Orchestra" reaches an almost ideal marriage of discipline and sensuality—a balance that Bernstein himself, in both his life and his music, struggled mightily to achieve.

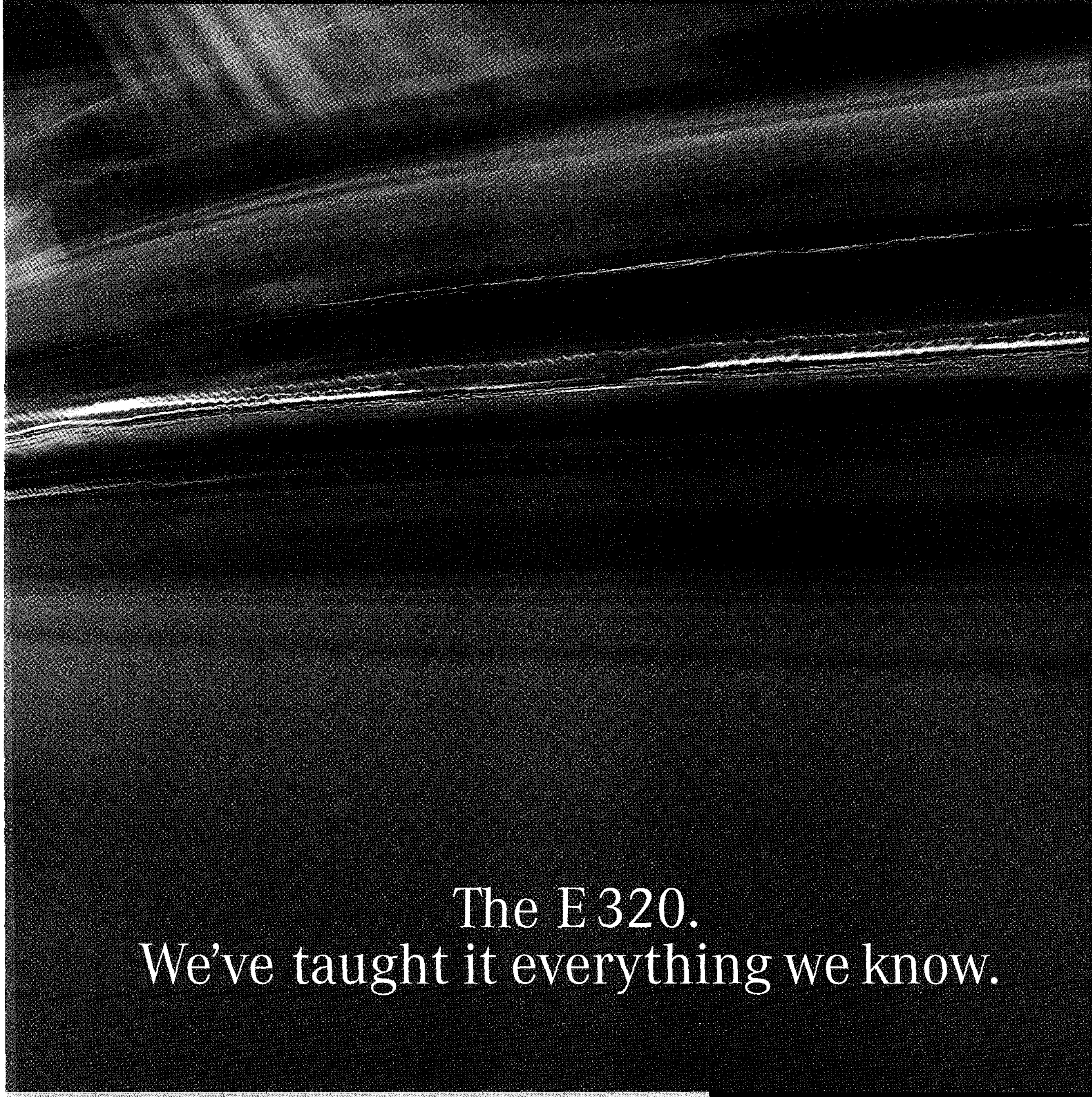
—*Russell Platt*

TALKS

Nov. 13 at 6:30: Merlin Holland, the co-editor of "The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde," offers a lecture about his grandfather titled "Confounding the Critics, Surviving the Scandal: The Remarkable Legacy of Oscar Wilde." (Donnell Library Center, 20 W. 53rd St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Nov. 13 at 7:30: Lourdes Lopez, a former member of the New York City Ballet, and the Barnard dance professor Lynn Garafola, who recently returned from Havana, talk about ballet in Cuba. (Julius Held Lecture Hall, Barnard College, Broadway at 117th St. No tickets necessary.)

TOUR

Nov. 12 at 9:30 A.M.: The naturalist Cliff Hagen sets out for the southern beaches of Staten Island (yes, they exist), in search of such ducks as the bufflehead and the red-breasted merganser, as well as other wildlife. (For more information, call 718-727-1135, ext. 16.)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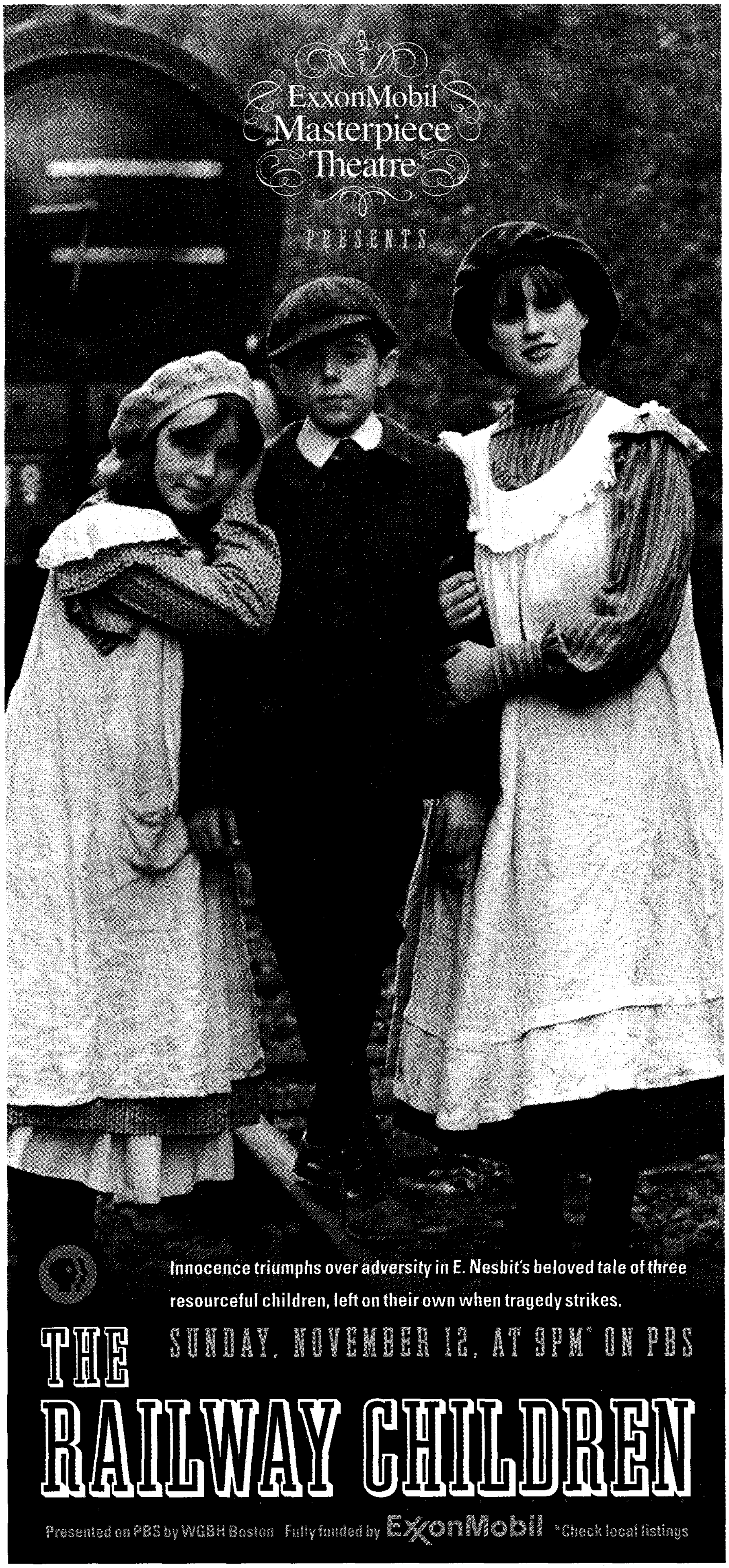
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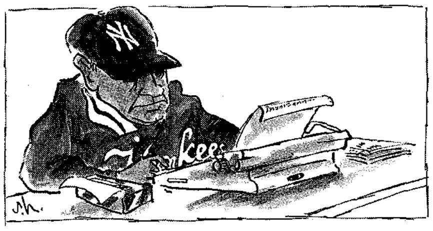
BOOK CURRENTS

Subway Serious

Now that the mountains of ticker tape have been swept away, Yankee fans can settle into yet another off-season of smug self-satisfaction. But the Mets and their eternally optimistic fans (not to mention those who rooted for the White Sox, Mariners, Red Sox, and so on) should take heart: a number of recent books offer consolation and, perhaps, some insight into the diamond life.



SIDNEY HARRIS

In the battle for publishing domination, the Yanks reign supreme, with tomelike histories of the Bombers' dynasty crowding every other team off the shelf. Yet one of the best Yankee books doesn't traffic in pinstripe triumphalism: **THOSE DAMN YANKEES** (Verso), by Dean Chadwin, is a Yankee hater's bible, in which Rudy Giuliani's favorite ball club is derided as "a team for bullies and poor losers who never met an underdog they liked." Chadwin, who followed the cruelly efficient Yankee campaigns of 1998 and 1999, saves his best shots for the team's owner, George Steinbrenner, who comes off as baseball's Nixon—a manic, impatient competitor who occasionally breaks the rules to get ahead.

Even Mets fans have a hard time coming up with bad things to say about Joe Torre, the Yanks' sage manager, whose **GROUND RULES FOR WINNERS** (Hyperion) offers "twelve keys" to managing the game of life, including dealing with a tough boss "who meddles in your business." Similarly, World Series M.V.P. Derek Jeter, the most visible superstar on a team of superstars, has penned **THE LIFE YOU IMAGINE** (Crown), an autobiographical self-help manual that contains such inspirational sentiments as "Standing at shortstop and knowing that I am the shortstop for the Yankees is awesome." Maybe next year, Bobby Valentine and Mike Piazza will finally be able to feel awesome, too.

—*Mark Rozzo*

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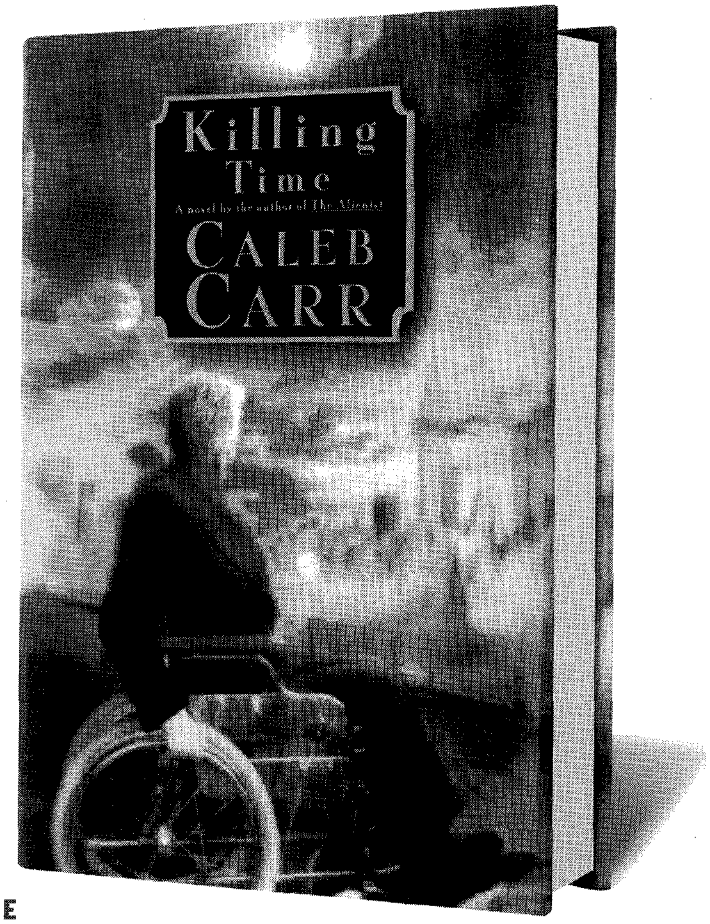

KILLING TIME

by Caleb Carr

Caleb Carr, bestselling author of *The Alienist* and *The Angel of Darkness*, returns with a brilliantly conceived new thriller, *Killing Time*. The year is 2023 and the world is in chaos. When psychologist and criminologist Dr. Gideon Wolfe gains evidence that a renegade band of media manipulators altered the now-famous video of the president's assassination, his investigation leads him from New York's treacherous underworld to the jungles of Africa. (Random House)

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MOVIES OPENING

LITTLE NICKY
A comedy set in New York City with Adam Sandler as the youngest son of the devil. Also with Patricia Arquette, Harvey Keitel, Rodney Dangerfield, and Ozzy Osbourne. Directed by Steven Brill. Opening Nov. 10.

ME & ISAAC NEWTON
Michael Apted ("42 Up") directed this documentary about the work and life of seven contemporary scientists, including Michio Kaku, Steven Pinker, and Patricia Wright. Opening Nov. 10.

MEN OF HONOR
Cuba Gooding, Jr., and Robert De Niro in an action drama, set in the nineteen-fifties, about the son of a Kentucky sharecropper who joins the Navy's deep-sea-diving corps. Opening Nov. 10.

NON-STOP
A hapless robber, a convenience-store clerk, and a low-level mobster chase each other through the streets of Tokyo in this comedy directed by Sabu. In Japanese. Opening Nov. 10. (State.)

REBELS WITH A CAUSE
A documentary about Students for a Democratic Society, directed by Helen Garvy. Opening Nov. 10. (The Screening Room.)

RED PLANET
It's the year 2050, and humankind must colonize Mars in order to escape a polluted Earth. Val Kilmer, Carrie-Anne Moss, and Tom Sizemore play members of the initial mission. Directed by Anthony Hoffman. Opening Nov. 10.

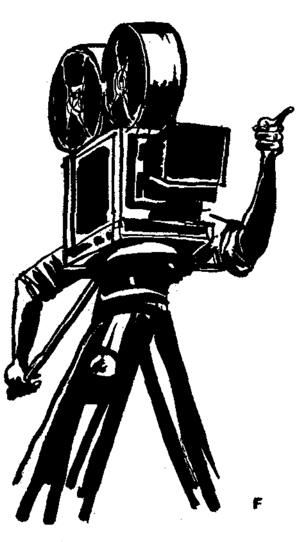
SUZHOU RIVER
Directed by Lou Ye, this drama about a motorcycle courier who falls in love with the woman he kidnaps is an homage to "Vertigo." In Mandarin. Opening Nov. 8. (Film Forum.)

YOU CAN COUNT ON ME
A single mother (Laura Linney) in upstate New York must cope with the unexpected arrival of her younger brother (Mark Ruffalo) in a drama written and directed by Kenneth Lonergan. With Matthew Broderick. Opening Nov. 10.

FILM NOTES

ALMOST FAMOUS
Cameron Crowe's genial but remarkably undramatic account of his life and not very hard times as a fifteen-year-old rock critic in the early nineteen-seventies. Crowe's stand-in, William Miller (Patrick Fugit), leaves home against the wishes of his college-professor mom (Frances McDormand) when he accepts an assignment from *Rolling Stone* to cover a mid-level band called Stillwater. On the road, he falls into an intense admiration of the good-looking lead guitarist (Billy Crudup) and receives gentle treatment from a trio of groupies, the Band-Aids (led by Kate Hudson). Much of the movie plays easily and well as a record of good times, but there's no particular point to it.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 9/18/00.) (Battery Park 16, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas.)

BAMBOOZLED
In his latest picture, Spike Lee delivers some shattering news: TV is bad for us, and for race relations. Marlon Wayans plays Pierre Delacroix—a TV writer who is hired by a network to come up with a fresh idea, and duly delivers a minstrel show, complete with chicken gags and black actors encrusted in blackface. The ratings hit the roof, but Pierre and his colleague (Jada Pinkett-Smith), as well as the energetic stars of the act (Savion Glover and Tommy Davidson), come to feel besmirched by their success, as if they were betraying the black cause. (You can't help thinking that one of them might have noticed that to begin with.) Having started with satirical high jinks, the movie ends in desperate spasms of subplot, and you keep tripping over the big bump in Lee's conceit: the minstrel show itself is stupendously unamusing.—*Anthony Lane* (10/9/00) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)



BEDAZZLED
Elizabeth Hurley, the model-actress, makes a fine, vampy Devil. Her eyes gleam with sinister intent, but her mouth seems to be a problem: she's always spitting her words. Did someone not hold the mike close enough? Brendan Fraser plays the office alpha geek who sells his soul for fame, fortune, and (he hopes) love, and he keeps up a funny stammering act through his various incarnations; after he's transformed into "the most emotionally sensitive man in the world," his lip quivers uncontrollably at every sunset. With quick dialogue and plentiful visual puns, the director Harold Ramis and the writer Larry Gelbart manage to breathe some life into an old, old story, but it's just a puff.—*Michael Agger* (Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Union Square.)

BELLE DE JOUR
The antiheroine of Luis Buñuel's brilliant 1967 black comedy is a cool, upper-crust blonde named Séverine (Catherine Deneuve), a survivor of child abuse and a frigid wife who moonlights as a prostitute. Buñuel was clear on his program: "Just between us," he wrote his co-writer, Jean-Claude Carrière, "a ridiculous theme, but intriguing. A multitude of whores with terrible conflicts between the superego and the id." The ambiguities in this film are purposeful, because Buñuel's art evokes, in an extreme way, the merging of the rational and irrational in the everyday. Deneuve is magnificent in this role; her unusual combination of surface blankness and inner steel make Séverine the kind of woman any man can fantasize about, from her "boy scout" doctor husband (Jean Sorel) to a gangster with gilded teeth (Pierre Clementi). As a well-bred wife, she wears Yves Saint Laurent suits that complete her; as a demimondaine, she wears her naked beauty proudly. In French.—*Michael Sragow* (Symphony Space; Nov. 14.)

BILLY ELLIOT
The British director Stephen Daldry has previously concentrated on theatre; now, as if to prove that he's a man for all art forms, he's made a film about ballet. Billy Elliot (Jamie Bell) is a slim, pugnacious boy who doesn't enjoy his boxing lessons but casts a jealous glance at the dance class that rehearses nearby. He joins in, prospers, gets some private tuition from his careworn teacher (Julie Walters), and ends up auditioning for the Royal Ballet. Will he make it? Can you guess? Although the film is set during the miners' strike of 1984 (the most grievous strife in Britain's recent history), it slowly sheds its anger and abrasive comedy in favor of something softer. Billy's father (Gary Lewis) stops looking like a human pressure cooker and starts giving the boy encouraging hugs—a development we could do without. The best thing on view is Bell, whose ratty, unsentimental demeanor just about sees the story though. With music by T. Rex, The Jam, and other ethereal favorites of the classical stage.—*A.L.* (10/30/00) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

BLAIR WITCH 2: BOOK OF SHADOWS
Rubbishy, incoherent sequel to the hair-raising "documentary" about an encounter with the supernatural in the Maryland woods. A group of thrill seekers go on a tour of the same woods, and then retreat to a warehouse, where you are cooped up with them for an eternity. Directed by Joe Berlinger, a documentary filmmaker; written by Berlinger and Dick Beebe.—*D.D.* (Astor Plaza, Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

CHARLIE'S ANGELS
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, 64th and 2nd, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

THE CONTENDER
Vigorously unsubtle political entertainment. The Democratic President, Jackson Evans (Jeff Bridges), a wily, dominating fellow who may not be good at heart, nominates a woman, Senator Laine Hanson (Joan Allen), to be his Vice-President after the sitting Vice-President dies. A Republican congressman, Shelly Runyon (Gary Oldman), wants to block her. His weapon: some photographs of her participation, as a college freshman, in a frat-house orgy. When the Senator stands on her dignity, refusing to answer Runyon's questions, the movie becomes an attack on double standards—a noble conception but also a needlessly solemn one. The picture is juicily well acted, however, particularly by Oldman. Written and directed by Rod Lurie, who uses Washington unimaginatively, like a TV-movie director.—*D.D.* (10/16 & 10/23/00) (Battery Park 16, Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, Union Square, Waverly 1 and 2, and Ziegfeld.)

DANCER IN THE DARK
The new Lars Von Trier film makes his previous efforts seem like models of orthodoxy and restraint. Shot in Sweden, it's set in an America of Von Trier's own devising. Most of the characters speak with foreign accents, and the heroine—a timid, bespectacled factory worker and single mother named Selma—is played by Björk, the Icelandic pop munchkin. Selma has a congenital eye disease, and she is saving up to pay for an operation for her young son, who will otherwise follow her into blindness. The film is unashamedly two-toned, split between a granular authenticity and a stylized gaudiness. The musical scenes—in the factory, on a railroad track—have a deliberate, stamping awkwardness, overlaid with Björk's animal wailing. Many viewers have refused to stomach this unhealthy mixture, yet it feels laced with surprising power, and the harshness of the dénouement is unfeigned.—*A.L.* (9/25/00) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, State, and Union Square.)

DR. T & THE WOMEN
Dressed to the nines in billowing capes, fur chokers, and huge, drooping hats, the upper-crust women of Dallas rush about the city, drinks in hand, and when they have nothing else to do, which is most of the time, they storm the office of their gynecologist, Dr. T (Richard Gere), a handsome and masterly practitioner who treats them like goddesses. At first, Robert Altman's movie seems to be an amiable, whirligig farce—and a borderline dirty joke—about a man who sugars women, and the women who love him in return, but it develops an odd, apocalyptic tone. There are recurring rainstorms, including a real humdinger at the end, which is supposed to cleanse the fallen city of Dallas. Altman works with his usual fluid camera and his overlapped chattering voices, but there's a sourness bordering on condescension which destroys the pleasures of his skill.—*D.D.* (10/16 & 10/23/00) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, Cinema I, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)

GREETINGS
A pleasantly tawdry mixture of an underground film, a skin flick, and a college revue, with a draft-

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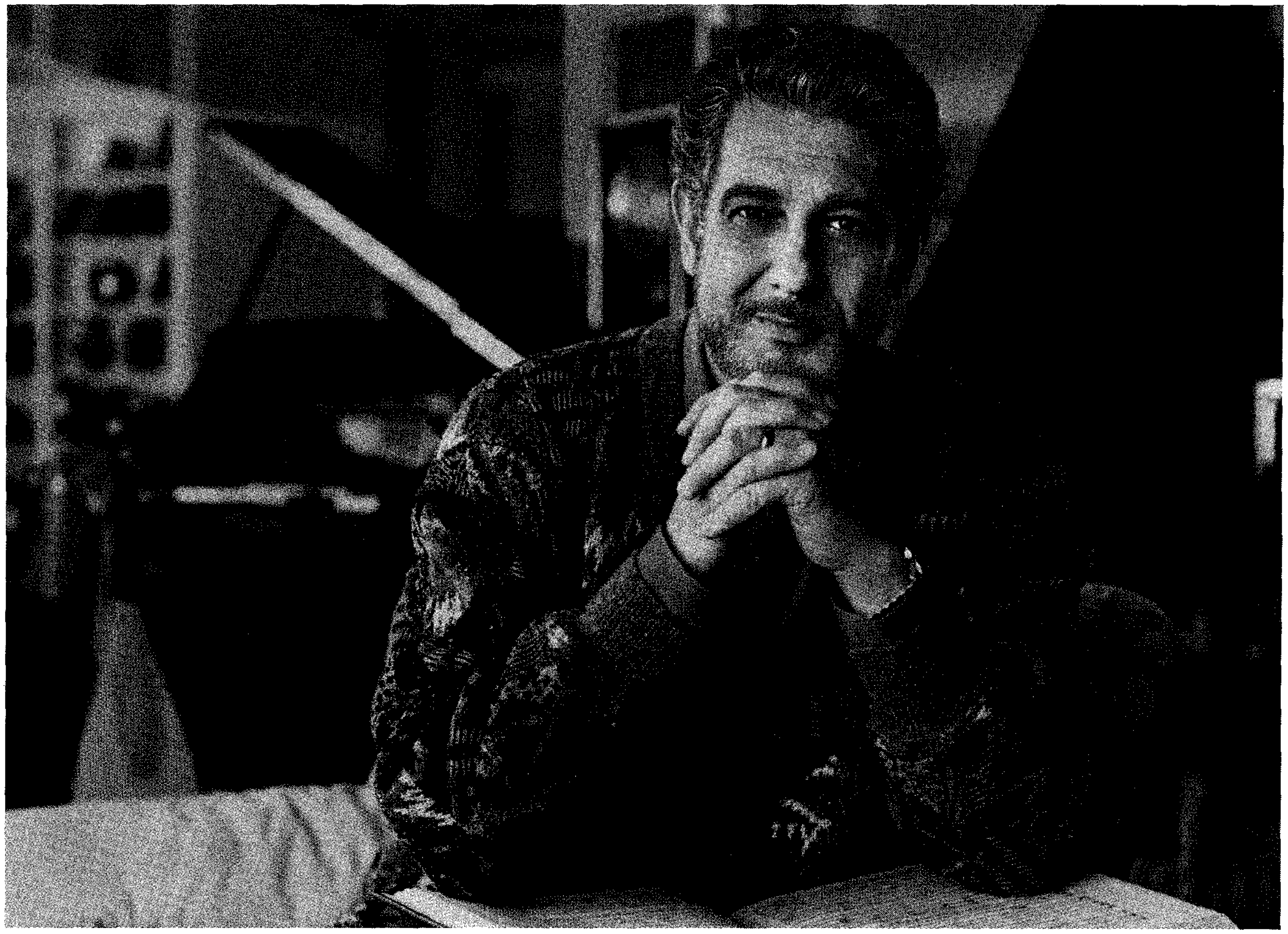
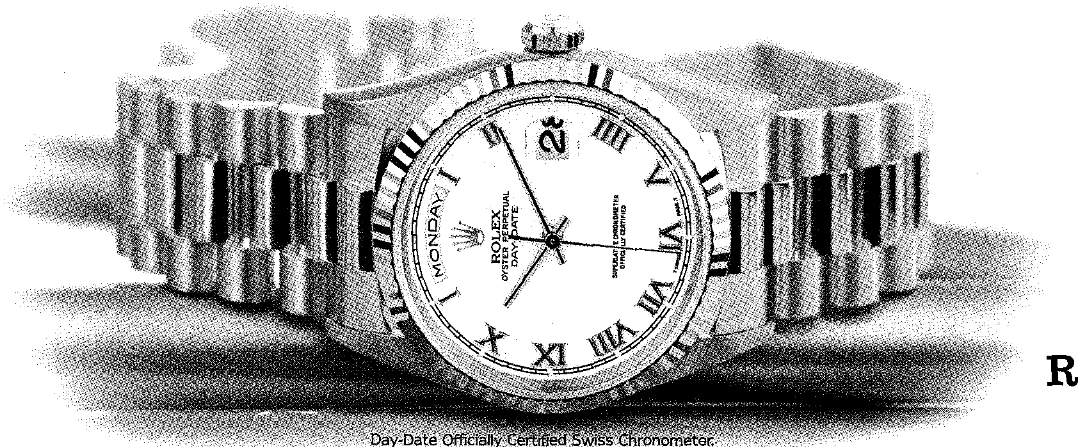


International opera star, conductor and artistic director of the Washington and Los Angeles Operas, Plácido Domingo is a man on the move. But wherever he goes, Domingo wears his Rolex Day-Date. Perhaps because its standard of performance is as high as his.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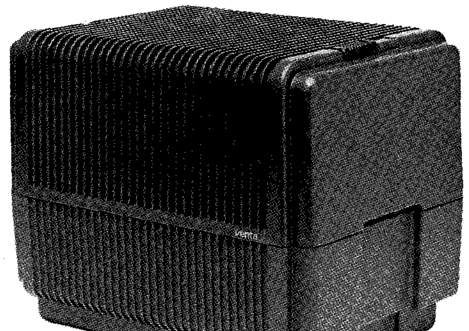

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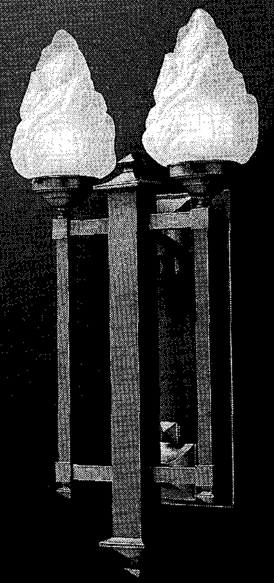

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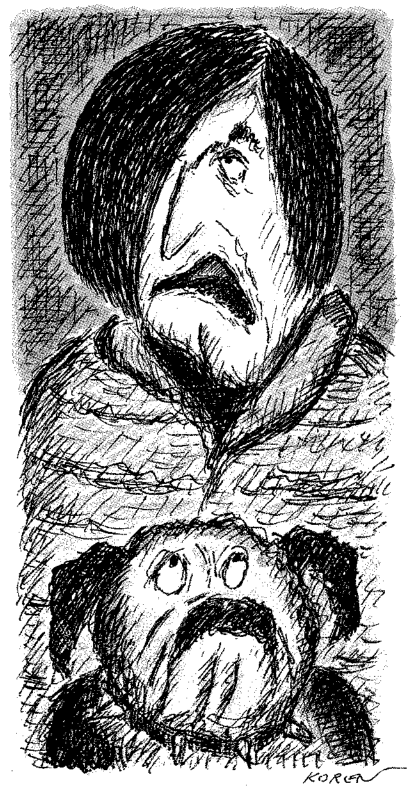
evader hero and good-humored, casually obscene performances from a whole gallery of talented actors, including Robert De Niro, Jonathan Warden, Gerrit Graham, and Allen Garfield. Directed, edited, and co-written by Brian De Palma, who made it in 1968 on a shoestring of less than forty thousand dollars and in color.—*Pauline Kael* (American Museum of the Moving Image; Nov. 11-12.)

THE LEGEND OF BAGGER VANCE
Robert Redford, directing in pastoral-elegy mode: the light is golden, the colors are blended, and drama is nowhere to be found. He's made a tall tale about golf in the early thirties, with Matt Damon as a Savannah athlete demoralized by the First World War and Will Smith as an angelic black caddie who emerges from the gloaming and restores Damon by whispering incomprehensible remarks in his ear about feeling his way to an "authentic stroke." With Charlize Theron around, Damon shouldn't have any trouble restoring himself through love, but the movie is too dreamy and silly for sex. Again and again, the camera takes the point of view of a golf ball on simulated flights through the air. The ball lands with a thunk—and so does the movie.—*D.D.* (11/6/00) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)



Opening November 10, Adam Sandler in the comedy "Little Nicky."

EDWARD KOREN

THE LEGEND OF DRUNKEN MASTER
Jackie Chan in mint condition, fighting off an axe gang with a wooden bench in each hand. Colonial China as a place where even friends greet each other with a bit of fist play. These are the hallmarks of a classic kung-fu film. What surprises are the finely wrought scenes of Chinese daily life (the market, the train, the school courtyard) and the sprightly comic performance of Anita Mui as a mah-jongg-obsessed wife. Chan made this film in 1994 as an homage to "Drunken Master," the 1979 film that turned him into a star, and its final twenty-minute fight scene inside a steel mill is considered one of the genre's high-water marks. For this rerelease, the dialogue has been dubbed into English, and the mismatched mouths take you

back to the Saturday-afternoon double features of days gone by.—*M.A.* (Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Gotham Cinema, Kips Bay Theatre, and Village East Cinemas.)

MEET THE PARENTS

Jay Roach moves on from the campy delights of the Austin Powers series to direct this smoothly acted comedy of errors. Ben Stiller plays a modern man charged with a Victorian task: asking his girlfriend's father for permission to marry his daughter. With a calamitous surname ("pronounced just like it's spelled, F-O-C-K-E-R") and a faintly hilarious profession (male nurse), Stiller seems like a sitting duck for the secretive, overprotective father, played by Robert De Niro. Stiller grovels, De Niro growls, and the girls (Blythe Danner and Teri Polo) watch from the sidelines. This is dumbed-up comedy: there are just enough unexpected moments to redeem all the easy pleasures of the slapstick.—*M.A.* (Battery Park 16, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

PAY IT FORWARD

An embarrassingly ham-handed fable about doing good deeds, but worth seeing for Helen Hunt's first-rate performance as an alcoholic Las Vegas cocktail waitress and single mother—a woman with lousy judgment who wants to do the right thing but doesn't know how. As a classroom exercise, her son Trevor (Haley Joel Osment) devises the scheme of "pay it forward"—performing a gratuitous act of kindness for three people and then insisting that they do the same for three others. Trevor helps strangers, but, playing Cupid, he's more eager to help his mother meet his teacher (Kevin Spacey). It's a rum role for Spacey, who sacrifices his aura of malevolence by delivering an unconvincing, weepy confession fit for a TV movie. Written by Leslie Dixon, from Catherine Ryan Hyde's novel, and directed by Mimi Leder.—*D.D.* (11/6/00) (Coronet Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

RATCATCHER

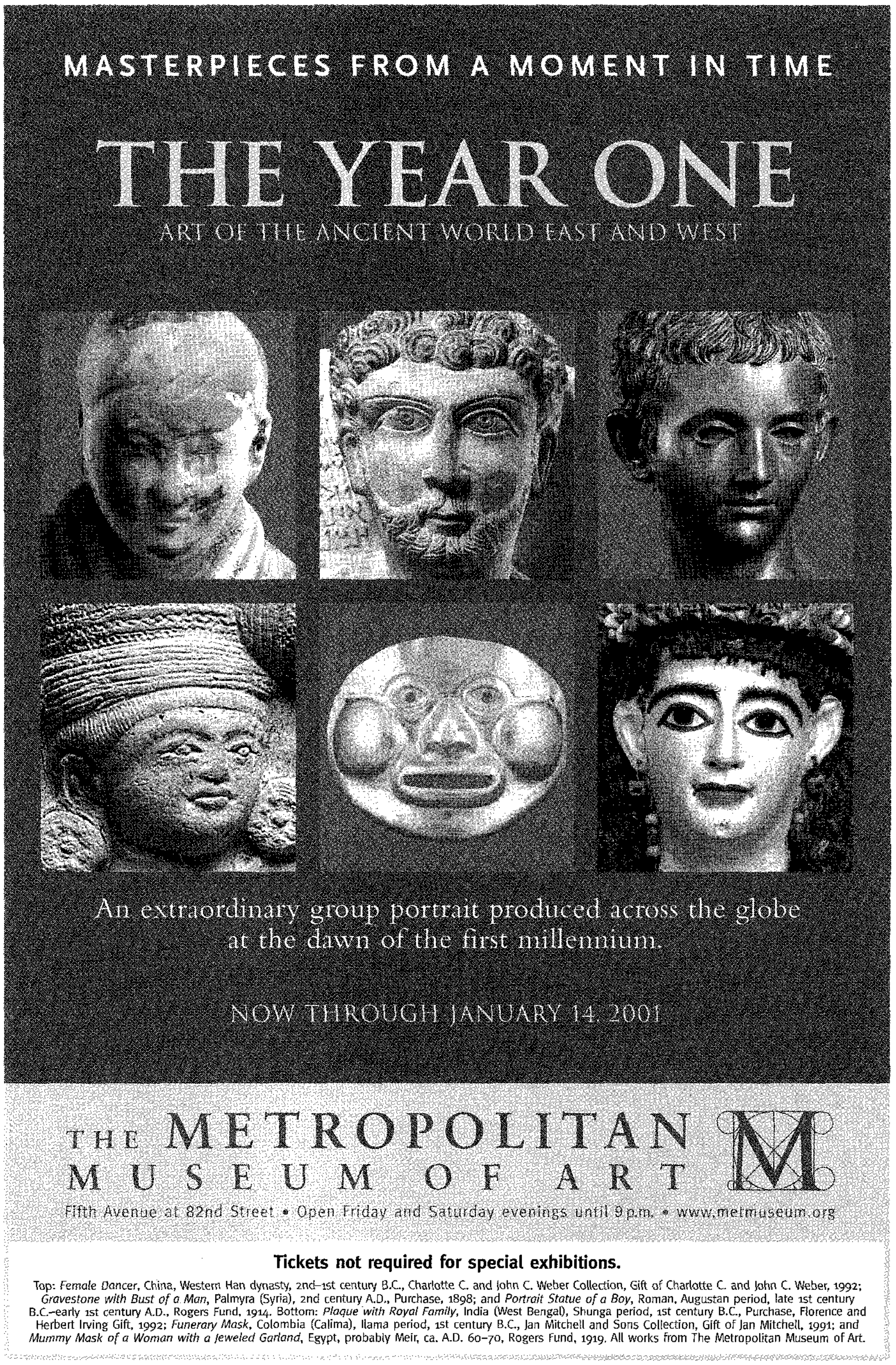
There are no cheap epiphanies in this interior, melancholy portrait of a boy growing up in a Glasgow housing project. The director Lynne Ramsay discovered William Eadie, an untrained actor, and she evokes a complete emotional consciousness from his open, enigmatic face. Her camera hews so closely to his world view that you become fully immersed in his sadness. The inexplicable tragedy that opens the film remains just that, and this lack of closure resonates long after the end credits.—*M.A.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

REQUIEM FOR A DREAM

Darren Aronofsky's new film stars Ellen Burstyn as Sara Goldfarb, a Brighton Beach widow who launches herself on a crash diet—a path that will lead to pill addiction and electroshock therapy. Meanwhile, her son Harry (Jared Leto) and his girlfriend, Marion (Jennifer Connelly), yield to the pull of hard drugs. No one in this picture seems to have any powers of resistance; who would have thought denizens of Brighton Beach would give up without a fight? Each of the characters is fenced in by solitude; Aronofsky divides them by split screen, and punches home their addiction with a blistering montage of pills, puffs, and dilating eyes. All this is managed with formidable skill, but it shuts the movie down, and the various junkies—even Burstyn, who gives the role everything she's got—end up looking less substantial than their respective poisons. A cautionary tale, maybe, but it gets a dangerous buzz from the aesthetics of a fix. The script was adapted from the novel by Hubert Selby, Jr., who appears as a ferrety prison guard.—*A.L.* (10/9/00) (84th Street Sixplex and Union Square.)

SOUTH

In 1914, the British explorer Ernest Shackleton, determined to be the first to cross the continent of Antarctica, led H.M.S. Endurance into frozen seas that stymied the ship's progress and then crushed it in shifting ice. A cinematographer named Frank



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Top: *Female Dancer*, China, Western Han dynasty, 2nd–1st century B.C., Charlotte C. and John C. Weber Collection, Gift of Charlotte C. and John C. Weber, 1992; *Gravestone with Bust of a Man*, Palmyra (Syria), 2nd century A.D., Purchase, 1898; and *Portrait Statue of a Boy*, Roman, Augustan period, late 1st century B.C.–early 1st century A.D., Rogers Fund, 1914. Bottom: *Plaque with Royal Family*, India (West Bengal), Shunga period, 1st century B.C., Purchase, Florence and Herbert Irving Gift, 1992; *Funerary Mask*, Colombia (Calima), Ilama period, 1st century B.C., Jan Mitchell and Sons Collection, Gift of Jan Mitchell, 1991; and *Mummy Mask of a Woman with a Jeweled Garland*, Egypt, probably Meir, ca. A.D. 60–70, Rogers Fund, 1919. All works from The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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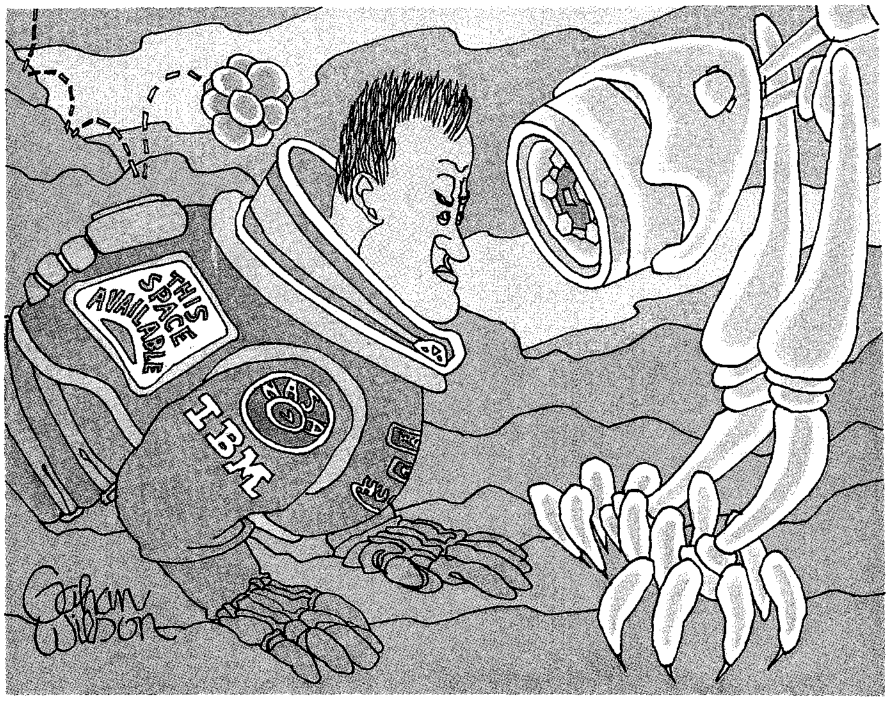
Hurley was part of the crew, and he shot this awesomely beautiful eighty-minute documentary. The film doesn't tell a tidy narrative. Hurley and the rest were stuck for eight months and adrift for five, but "South" gives us visceral images unlike any other movie: the camera glides with the prow of the Endurance as it hovers over ice-encrusted water, and the frozen vessel glitters against the night in stark, haunting relief.—*M.S.* (The Screening Room; Nov. 11-12.)

A TIME FOR DRUNKEN HORSES
The Northern Iran winters are so cold that the Kurdish smugglers who live there feed their mules alcohol so that they will carry loads over the mountain passes. In this world of high-risk border crossings and death by land mine, a fatherless young boy named Ayoub scrapes out a living doing odd tasks, supporting his sisters and crippled brother. This may seem like a recipe for seventy-seven minutes of misery, but the director Bahman Ghobadi's affection for his subjects gives the film a certain lightness. He takes the raw materials of his homeland—the harsh landscape, communal rooms, and lambent-eyed children—and fashions a visual poem. Ghobadi documents his subjects without intruding, and the results are quietly enthralling. In Kurdish.—*M.A.* (State.)



Val Kilmer leads a mission to Mars in "Red Planet," opening November 10.

VERTIGO
It's as if you've never seen it before, because you've never "heard" it before. The restored prints of the ultimate cult movie—Hitchcock's voluptuous exploration of *l'amour fou*—present the original 1958 musical tracks in state-of-the-art sound that extracts previously hidden undertones and highlights from Bernard Herrmann's score. Of the composer's frequent collaborations with Hitchcock (including "Psycho"), this is the most complex and brilliant; he deploys everything from an habanera to a waltz macabre to illuminate the morbid romanticism at the movie's core. With soaring visual eloquence (a unique mixture of the mist-draped and the hard-edged), Hitchcock takes voyeurism and amorous fixation to audacious, almost necrophiliac lengths in this tale of a retired San Francisco police detective (James Stewart) investigating an old acquaintance's wife (Kim Novak). Despite its misshapen form and languor (Stewart crosses a hotel room in the time it took for him to race across London in "The Man Who Knew Too Much"), the movie is hypnotic and gloriously operatic—not a conventional masterpiece but an auteur's classic, flooded with the master's erotic and moral obsessions.—*M.S.* (Symphony Space; Nov. 14.)

THE YARDS
A lowering, deep-browed thriller from the director James Gray, who made a name for himself with "Little Odessa." In many ways, this is more of the same: a tight and sometimes tortured community, the sober settling of scores, and what feels like an official rationing of daylight. Mark Wahlberg plays Leo, who's trying to go straight; he takes a job as sidekick to his old friend Willie (Joaquin Phoenix), who fixes contracts for the New York subway system. Things go well, then badly, then worse still, until Leo is dwelling in subterranean solitude—Gray's kind of place. The supporting cast is tough and tested: Faye Dunaway, Ellen Burstyn, and especially James Caan, who plays Leo's uncle by marriage. The film may be humorless, unflustered by the need to quicken or amuse, but it feels unfashionably true to itself. Gray has reconstructed a world that he knows, and conjured a mood that no one else would have the nerve to maintain. For good measure, he also stages a great street fight. With Charlize Theron as Willie's despairing girl.—*A.L.* (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea West, Cinema II, and Lincoln Square.)

ALSO PLAYING

ANIMAL FACTORY
Cinema Village.
BEST IN SHOW
Angelika Film Center, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, and 19th Street East 6.
BOSEMAN AND LENA
BAM Rose Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Quad Cinema.
THE BRIDGE
Paris.
CALLE 54
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.
THE EXORCIST
Battery Park 16, 59th Street East Cinema, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, and Union Square.
GEORGE WASHINGTON
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and The Screening Room.
KIPPUR
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.
REMEMBER THE TITANS
Battery Park 16, Cinema 3rd Avenue, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.
A ROOM FOR ROMEO BRASS
Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza.
SING-ALONG SOUND OF MUSIC
Waverly 1 and 2.
TIGERLAND
Empire 25.
VENUS BEAUTY INSTITUTE
Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.
YI YI (A ONE AND A TWO)
Film Forum.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770).
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St. (945-3418).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Dec. 3: "Visions of New York: Films from the 1960's Underground." Nov. 11 at 2: "The Connection" (1961, Shirley Clarke). ♦ Nov. 11 at 4: "The Flaming City" (1963, Dick Higgins). ♦ Nov. 12 at 4: "Slow Run" (1968, Lawrence Kardish). ♦ Classic movies. Nov. 11-12 at 6:30: "Greetings" (†).

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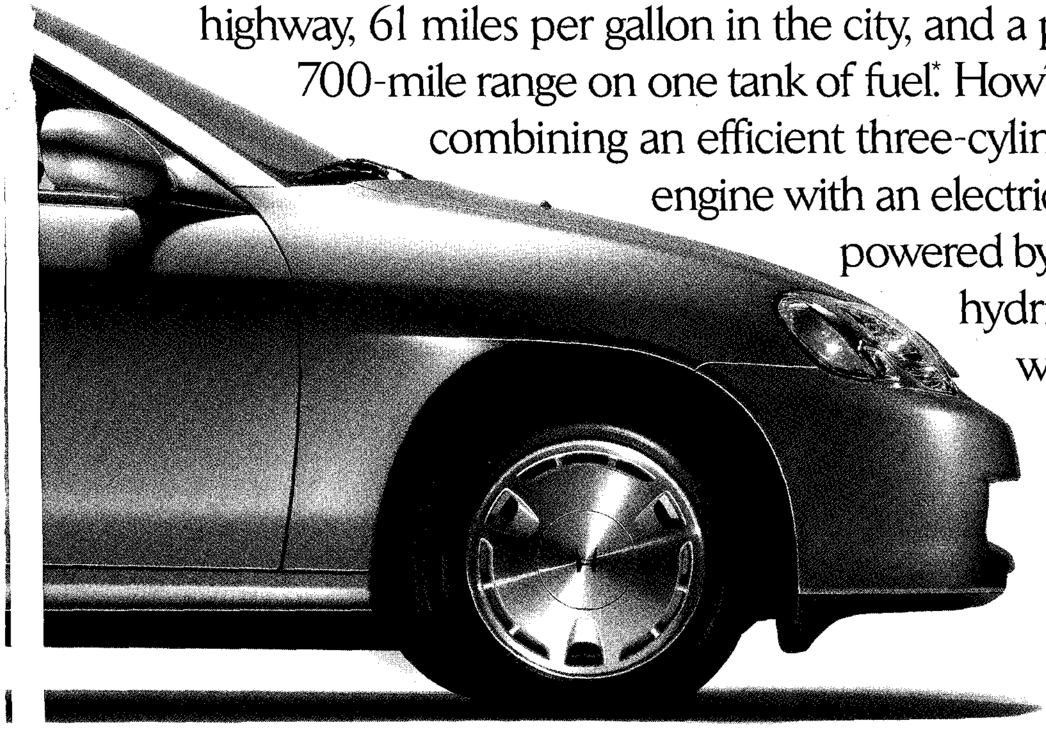

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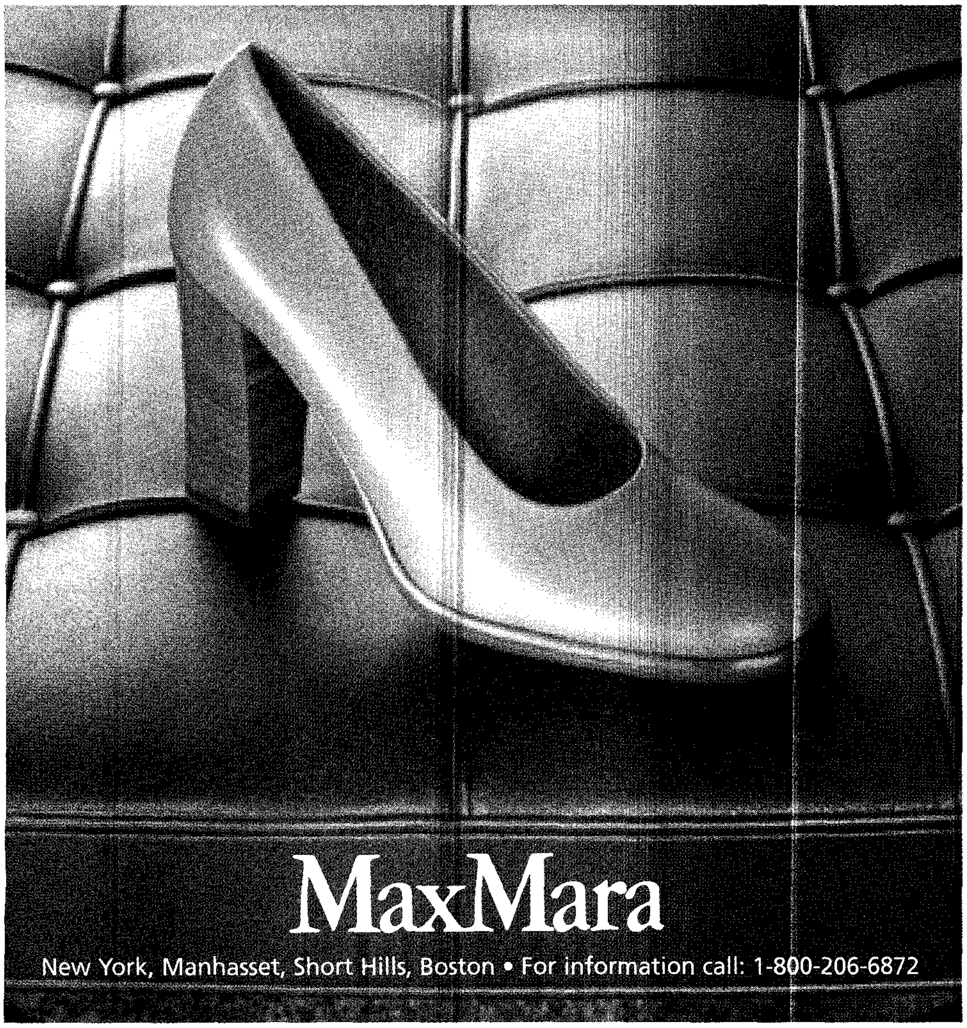

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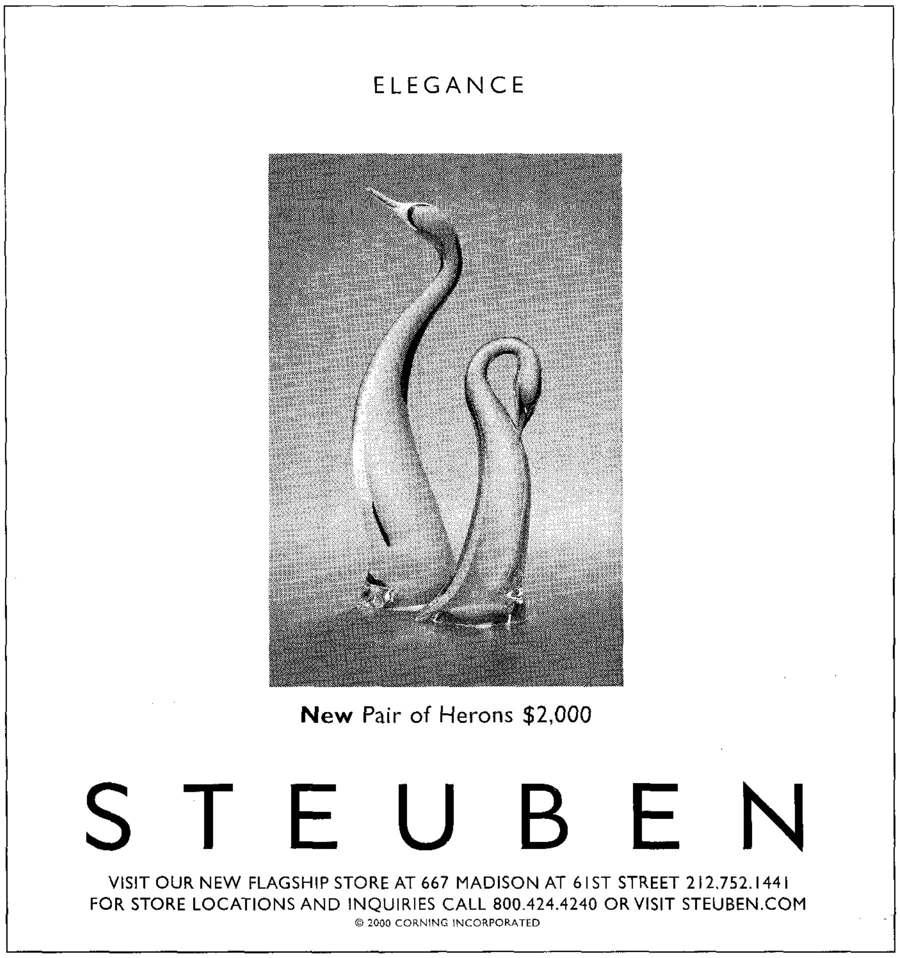

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ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—Nov. 9-11: The New York Comedy Film Festival. The third year of the festival features the première of the MTV host Pauly Shore's documentary "Spooge: Two Months in the Life of . . ." (2000). ♦ "Justice for New York Labor," films to benefit the striking workers of Domino Sugar and Rode & Horn Lumber in Williamsburg. Nov. 12 at 7: "Finally Got the News" (1970, Stewart Bird, Peter Gessner, Rene Lichtman, and John Louis, Jr.). ♦ Nov. 12 at 8:30: "Harlan County, U.S.A." (1976, Barbara Kopple).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770)—Nov. 8 at 7:10: "Rehearsal for War" (1998, Mario Martone; in Italian). ♦ Nov. 8 at 9:30: "David's Summer" (1998, Carlo Mazzacurati; in Italian). ♦ Nov. 9 at 4:30 and 9:20 and Nov. 10 at 6:50: "Good Men, Good Women" (1995, Hou Hsiao-hsien; in Mandarin). ♦ Nov. 9 at 7: A sneak preview of Ken Burns's "Jazz" (2000). ♦ Nov. 10 at 4:30 and 9:10 and Nov. 11-12 at 6:40: "Flowers of Shanghai" (1998, Hou; in Mandarin). ♦ Nov. 11 at 2, 4:30, and 9:10: "Dust in the Wind" (1986, Hou; in Mandarin and Taiwanese). ♦ Nov. 12 at 2, 4:30, and 9:20: "Goodbye South, Goodbye" (1996, Hou; in Taiwanese). ♦ Nov. 13 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "For Fun" (1992, Ning Ying; in Mandarin). ♦ Nov. 14 at 5 and 8:10: "Farewell My Concubine" (1993, Chen Kaige; in Mandarin).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through Nov. 30: "The British New Wave: From Angry Young Men to Swinging London." Nov. 8 at 1, 4, 7, and 10: "If . . ." (1968, Lindsay Anderson). ♦ Nov. 8 at 3, 6, and 9: "The White Bus" (1966, Anderson). ♦ Nov. 9 at 1:30, 5:40, and 9:45: "The Servant" (1963, Joseph Losey). ♦ Nov. 9 at 3:35 and 7:45: "The Pumpkin Eater" (1964, Jack Clayton). ♦ Nov. 10-11 at 3, 6:50, and 10:40: "A Taste of Honey" (1961, Tony Richardson). ♦ Nov. 10-11 at 1, 4:50, and 8:40: "A Kind of Loving" (1962, John Schlesinger). ♦ Nov. 12-13 at 1, 5:25, and 9:50: "Darling" (1965, Schlesinger). ♦ Nov. 12-13 at 3:20 and 7:45: "Alfie" (1966, Lewis Gilbert). ♦ Nov. 14 at 1, 5:30, and 9:40: "Tom Jones" (1963, Richardson). ♦ Nov. 14 at 3:40 and 7:50: "Morgan" (1966, Karel Reisz).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through Nov. 19: "Germany 2000: New Films." All films are in German. Nov. 9 at 6: "The Legends of Rita" (2000, Volker Schlöndorff). ♦ Nov. 9 at 6 and Nov. 10 at 3: "A Guy Like Dieter—Native of Golzow" (1999, Barbara and Winfred Junge). ♦ Nov. 10 at 1 and Nov. 12 at 5:30: "The State I Am In" (2000, Christian Petzold). ♦ Nov. 10 at 6:30 and Nov. 14 at 2:30: "Stammheim" (1985, Reinhard Hauff). ♦ Nov. 11 at 6: "Nightfall" (1999, Fred Keleman). ♦ Nov. 12 at 1:30 and Nov. 13 at 6: "Hans Warns—My Twentieth Century" (1999, Gordian Maugg). ♦ Nov. 12 at 3:30: "His Majesty Needs Sunshine" (1999, Peter Schamoni).

THE SCREENING ROOM
54 Varick St. (334-2100)—Classic Hong Kong action films. Nov. 10-11 at midnight: "Zu: Warriors from the Magic Mountain" (1983, Tsui Hark; in Cantonese). ♦ Nov. 11-12 at 1: "South" (†).

SYMPHONY SPACE
2537 Broadway, at 95th St. (864-5400)—Through Nov. 28: "Empires of Passion: The Cinema of Obsession." Nov. 14 at 7: "Vertigo" (†). ♦ Nov. 14 at 9:30: "Belle de Jour" (†).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Nov. 10-30: "Soviet Cinema of the Sixties and Seventies." All films are in Russian. Nov. 10 at 1 and 7 and Nov. 12 at 7:30: "Monologue" (1972, Ilya Averbakh). ♦ Nov. 10 at 3 and Nov. 11 at 9:30: "Brief Encounters" (1967, Kira Muratova). ♦ Nov. 10-11 at 5: "When Leaves Fall" (1966, Otar Iosseliani). ♦ Nov. 10 at 9:15 and Nov. 14 at 4:10: "Heat" (1963, Larisa Shepitko). ♦ Nov. 11 at 7:15 and Nov. 12 at 9:30: "Beginning of an Unknown Era" (1967, Andrei Smirnov and Shepitko). ♦ Nov. 12 at 4 and Nov. 14 at 1: "I Am Twenty" (1964, Zastava Ilyicha and Marlen Khutsiev).

THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

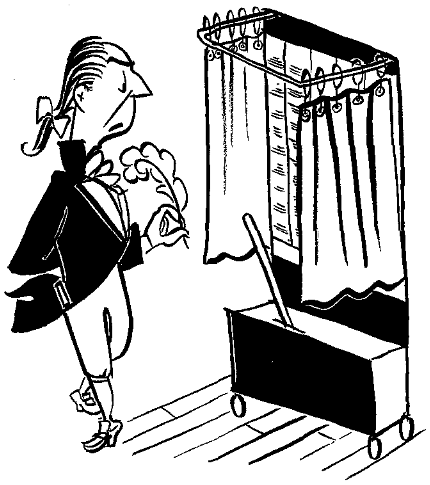
COMMENT
COLLEGE HIGH JINKS

Soon after this issue of *The New Yorker* goes to press, we'll learn whether we have bought ourselves the ultimate Electoral College wooden nickel: a President-elect fresh from getting beaten in the vote of the people. If that happens, it will at least have the virtue of provoking a general outcry on behalf of changing the weird, archaic system by which we pick our Presidents. The more likely (if less obvious) danger is that it won't happen, and we won't recognize the damage which that system has already wreaked.

Way back in 1787, when the delegates to the original Constitutional Convention met in Philadelphia, the question of how the "chief magistrate" should be chosen was low on their agenda. The big fights were over the composition of Congress. The Rube Goldberg contraption the framers finally devised to elect the President was a last-minute improvisation, and God knows it looks like one. The idea was that (1) each state's legislature would "appoint" a number of "electors" equal to the size of its congressional delegation, (2) the electors would vote, and (3) if one candidate won a majority of votes from the entire Electoral College he would be elected, but (4) if none had a majority the election would be thrown into the House of Representatives, only instead of each representative getting one vote, each state would get one vote. All clear?

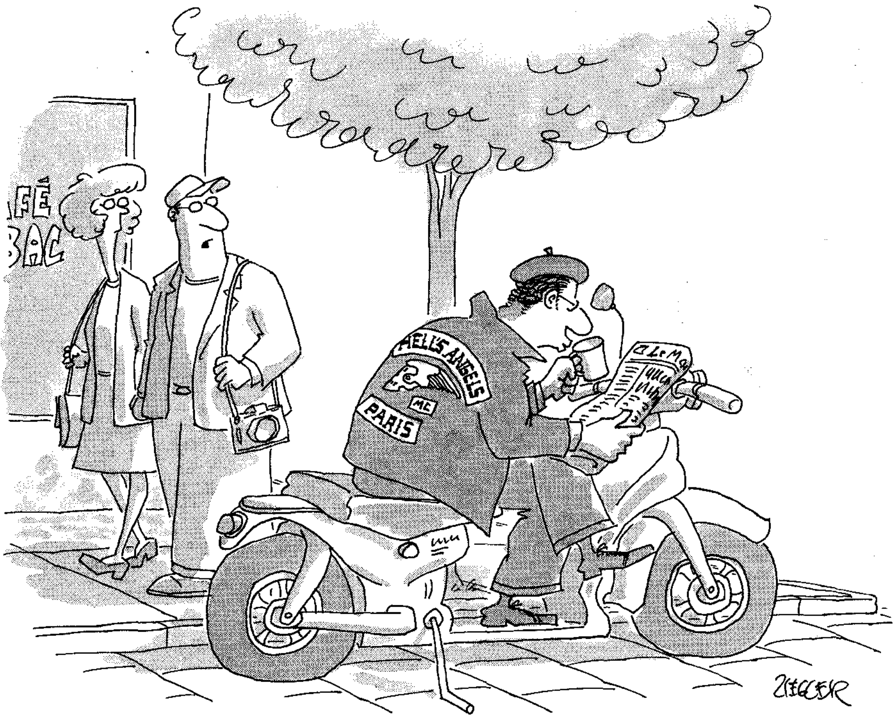
We now regard (4) as a goofy anomaly, but the framers envisioned it as S.O.P. They knew that George Washington would win the first Presidential election—and he did, unanimously. But after that, what? Well, the way the framers figured it, various grandees would get votes from their regions' electors, but, barring exceptional circumstances, none would get a majority. The "ultimate election," as James Madison put it, would take place in the House. So the usual pieties about the wisdom of the framers don't apply to Presidential elections, because the system the framers thought they were designing had little to do with the system they actually designed, let alone with any system that would be acceptable to the people of a modern democracy.

One of the many things the framers couldn't anticipate was that the state legislatures, intent on maximizing the relative clout of their states, would award all their electors to the plurality winner. (Forty-eight states—all but Maine and Nebraska—do it this way.) That's what created the possibility of a candidate who takes the overall popular vote but narrowly misses in just enough big electoral-vote states to lose the election—something that has happened three times, and almost happened as recently as 1976. It also created the situation whereby, as we have just witnessed, the vast majority of citizens are left out of the campaign. If you live anywhere except those famous half-dozen "swing" states, you might have read about the big last-minute advertising blitzes, but you probably didn't see any of the ads. Nor are you likely to have seen hide nor hair of the candidates. Your vote wasn't worth the trouble of soliciting. The concentration on voters in swing states, perfectly rational from the candidates' point of view, means that voters (or potential voters) in non-swing states—and that's most of us—don't get campaigned for. No wonder turnout is unfailingly lower in "safe" states: a lot of people, quite reasonably, find something more profitable to do on Election Day.



One obvious solution, promoted by several senators, including Orrin Hatch and Strom Thurmond, would be to require that each state's electors be divided according to the shares of the popular vote. Besides minimizing the threat of a perverse outcome, that would put every part of the country "in play." Every state

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL



"It's a whole different world over here, isn't it?"

• •

would be a swing state, and every candidate would have as much to gain from increasing his margins in his own "safe" states, and cutting down his opponents' margins in theirs, as from tipping the balance in, say, Wisconsin. However, because third-party candidates would suddenly have a shot at getting electoral votes, the quaint danger of throwing the election into the House, which hasn't happened since 1824, would become scarily real. That's why such proposals—along with congressional proposals supported by, among others, Bob Dole and Edward Kennedy for the other obvious solution, electing the President by popular vote—often provide for a special runoff election if no candidate tops forty per cent of the vote. But why stop at forty per cent? Why not try for—daring thought—majority rule? The Australians and the Irish use something called "instant-runoff voting," which allows voters to designate not only their top choice but also their second, third, and fourth; if there's no outright majority winner, the losing candidates are eliminated one by one and their supporters' alternative choices redistributed until, bingo, somebody goes over fifty per cent. (The voting is as simple as the counting is complicated, but that's what computers are for.) Although I.R.V. is still below the conventional wisdom's radar, serious moves are under way to adopt it in Vermont, New Mexico, and Alaska. I.R.V. would guarantee us a President elected with at least the grudging support of a majority. As a bonus, it would enable people to express themselves by voting for third parties—such as the Greens, this year—without running the awkward risk of helping elect their most unfavorite candidate. Granted, it's a little on the Rube Goldberg side. But, after two hundred years of the Electoral College, aren't we used to that?

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

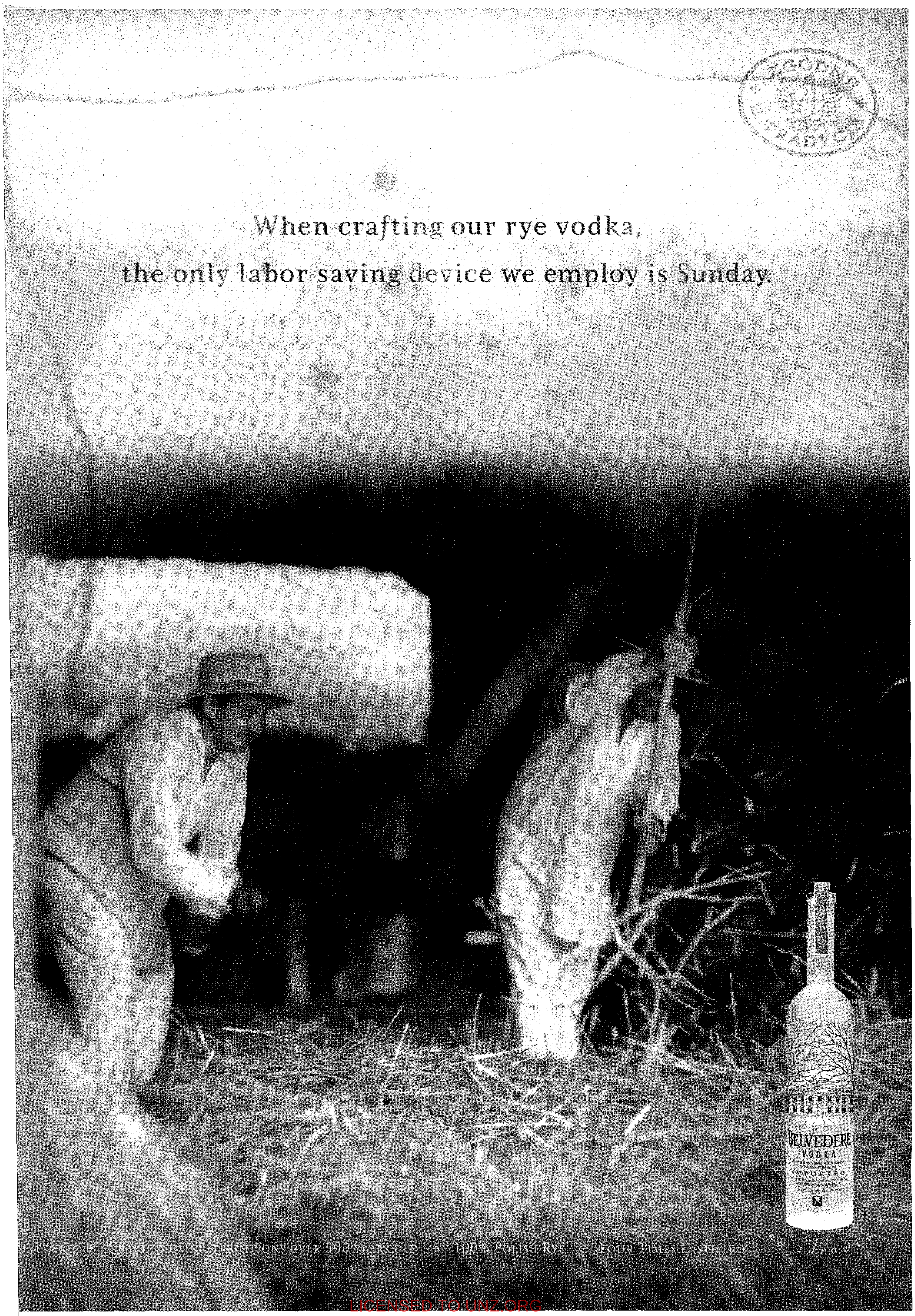
DEPT. OF HOOPLA
AN ANALOG TOAST TO THE DIGITAL AGE

It was name-dropping paradise the other night in the Four Seasons Grill Room, at a party thrown by Toni Goodale—identified in impressively comprehensive publicity handouts as a big-time fund-raising and management consultant for social services, performing arts, education, and whatnot; and as a competitive tennis player, youth hockey coach, and an awful lot more. Her husband, James Goodale, was identified likewise as a big-time First Amendment lawyer, *Times* general counsel during the Pentagon Papers case, Yale grad, and host of the PBS talk show "The Digital Age." The purpose of the party was to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the show.

The ceiling of the Grill Room was covered with thousands of giant balloons, and the floor held a lot of the people who had appeared on Goodale's show discussing such "Digital Age" topics as "Is There a Place for Two Tabloids in N.Y.C.?" (Mort Zuckerman); "If I Were to Do It All Over Again in the Digital Age" (Dan Rather); and "Can an All-Newspaper Company Make It?" (Arthur Sulzberger, Jr.). Right off the bat, the "Digital Age" alumna Robin Byrd turned up, grinning to beat the band and partaking of the lobster and caviar canapés. She was wearing an Austrian-crystal-studded leather bustier, black leather pants, and black patent-leather mules with six-inch stiletto heels.

"This is a great mix," she said enthusiastically, looking around the room and spotting Dan Rather, William Bratton, Howell Raines, Charlie Rose, Peter Duchin, Carl Bernstein, and Kenneth Starr. "It looks like not many are under the age of fifty or sixty. Nobody's talking digital to me," she said. "I was one of Jim's first guests. I pioneered cable twenty-five years ago. Time Warner tried, but failed, to get me off the air. I'm not digital, but I have a Web site and I want to get a Webcam at my house on Fire Island. I could be in my apartment on Sixty-seventh Street and see the ocean waves in front of my house. Otherwise, all that digital means to me is higher electric bills."

Victor Navasky, who is the publisher and editorial director of *The Nation*, and who has an elegant, patriarchal white beard, said he wasn't digital, either: "Everything starts with print on paper." Navasky said that he had assigned one of his students at the Columbia School of Journalism to come to the party. "I asked her to find out if the media élite go to parties with each other in order to do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business together," he said. "And, if so, is that a good thing or a bad thing?"

Ben Bradlee was in no mood to consider such philosophical questions. "I'm here because my wife, Sally, was Toni Goodale's roommate at Smith," he said. He opened his hands, spread his fingers, and held them up as though in surrender. "It has nothing to do with the digital age, if that's what we're in. I use my computer only as a word processor. I don't do E-mail or go on-line."

"Me, neither," said Morley Safer, the "60 Minutes" man. "I'm not giving up my typewriter."

"Me, neither," said Avery Corman, the author. "I'm here for Toni. I met her in tennis. She was a fourth in doubles. I'm working on a musical with Cy Coleman about the American Yiddish theatre. But I'm not a computer person. I don't even know anybody at this party except Toni. Who's the new media?"

"Me," answered a skinny young man. He was the youngest-looking person in the room. "Jeffrey Dachis," he said, offering his hand to anyone who would take it. He offered it to Michael Bloomberg, who took it coolly. "I'm Razorfish. C.E.O.," Dachis said.

"Razorfish?" a woman nearby asked. "What is it?"

"We design Web sites for companies," Dachis said.

"I know what you do," Bloomberg said evenly.

Dachis blossomed.

"The digital divide is closing between the haves and the have-nots," a man in a dark suit murmured to the young C.E.O.

Bloomberg turned and headed in the direction of Ben Bradlee and Harold Evans and Tina Brown and Arthur Sulzberger and Tom Brokaw.

A gentleman introduced himself as Tom Goodale, the brother of James. Tom, unlike his sibling, looked well rested, tanned, and carefree. He said that he knew hardly anybody at the party. "I go on cruise ships and dance with all the single ladies," he said. "I don't worry about the digital age. I'm out of it."

Robin Byrd approached, and Tom Goodale stared hard at her bustier.

"Somebody said I was just talking to Kofi Annan," she said. "But I wasn't. It was Carl McCall. Everybody is addressing him as 'Governor.' Is he running, or something?"

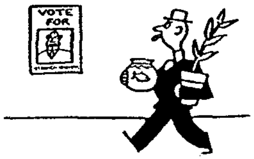
"The Goodales are taking the McCalls to St. Bart's after Thanksgiving," somebody said.

James Goodale got up to make a speech. "For a media lawyer, this is media fantasy camp," he said. "My friend Ben Bradlee has been bucking me up by saying, 'Hey, Goodale! There are more people here tonight than watch your show.' " (Much laughter.) He plowed gamely on: "We are truly in the digital age. I like to think I am in the middle of the greatest revolution since the Industrial Revolution." (Much applause.)

Victor Navasky paused at the head of the stairs leading to the exit. He said that his student had reported back to him about whether the media élite did business with one another at parties. The answer, she had told him, was yes, and when she and Navasky were back in class, somebody would decide whether this was a good thing or a bad thing.

—*Lillian Ross*

DEPT. OF TALKING HEADS
THE MAN BEHIND THE MASKS



On Halloween morning, a week before Election Day, David Byrne, the musician and artist, stepped out of his Greenwich Village town house to check on the status of his campaign to share his political opinions with the citizens of New York. He turned west on Twelfth Street and began searching for posters. "Hopefully, some went up overnight," he said. "The election is getting close."

Last week, posters designed by Byrne began appearing on scaffolding in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. Half of them depict a big, glistening, white plastic mask of Al Gore. The rest are masks of George W. Bush. The resemblance is not perfect. Gore's mask looks a bit like Morton Downey, Jr., and Bush's calls to mind Howard Baker, or Howdy Doody. With their tiny black eyeholes and toothy political grins, the images of the men fall somewhere between cartoonish and sinister. Printed beneath each, in bold type, is a single word: "Huh?"

"I guess it's my trying to express what I've heard expressed over and over—that nobody actually likes either of these guys," Byrne said, in that solemn guileless voice of his. He was walking uptown, wheeling a blue sticker-covered bicycle. His hair has gone gray, and he has a closely trimmed silver goatee. Nobody seemed to recognize him. "My friends are really surprised that I'm not actually the one out there putting the posters up with a bucket and glue," he said. "I tell them it doesn't work that way. It's a business." To get his three thousand six hundred posters displayed, or "sniped," as the practice is known, he'd hired a sniping company. "There are rates for specific neighborhoods, and for how long they'll be up, and it gets expensive," he said. "It makes you think. How much do you want to spend to get on your own little soapbox and make your own little statement?"

For Byrne, the answer is a bit over ten thousand dollars. That's a lot more than he spent in 1984, when he last sniped a pair of election posters. One was a photograph of President Reagan with the tag line "Actor." The other featured two photographs: a field of sunflowers with the word "Choice" underneath and a bombed-out landscape with the word "Vote." It didn't quite work out as he'd planned. "I didn't have an understanding of how much it costs to get a certain amount of coverage," he said. "I wanted these new ones to be more ubiquitous. So I paid for it."

As Byrne worked his way north, the posters weren't very ubiquitous. Not until he got into Chelsea did he come upon the first one. There it was, the smiling face of George W., perched, unfortunately, a full story above the sidewalk. "Worse, he's alone!" Byrne gasped. There was no Gore nearby. The point was kind of lost. "The snipers couldn't guarantee they'd be next to each other," he said. "Well, they could, but it was out of my price range." He moved on. Half a block later, there were more snipes: this time, a proper pair. Byrne stood back and admired them for a moment, then whipped out a little digital camera and snapped a picture of his creation. Two older women walked by, followed by two construction workers, none of whom appeared to notice the posters.

"Getting feedback on something like this is strange," Byrne said. "I've intentionally not put my name on it, and I

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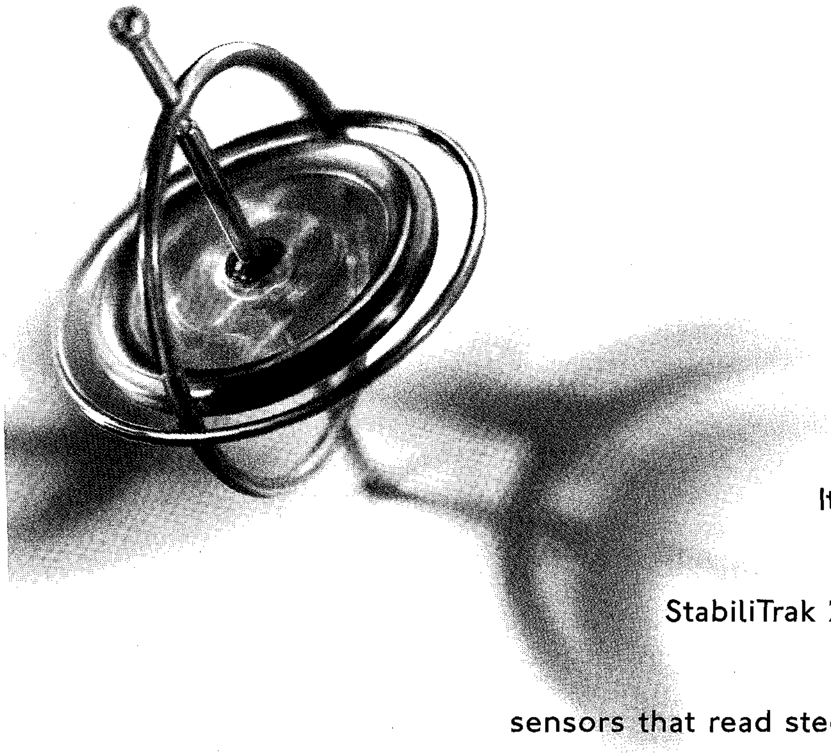

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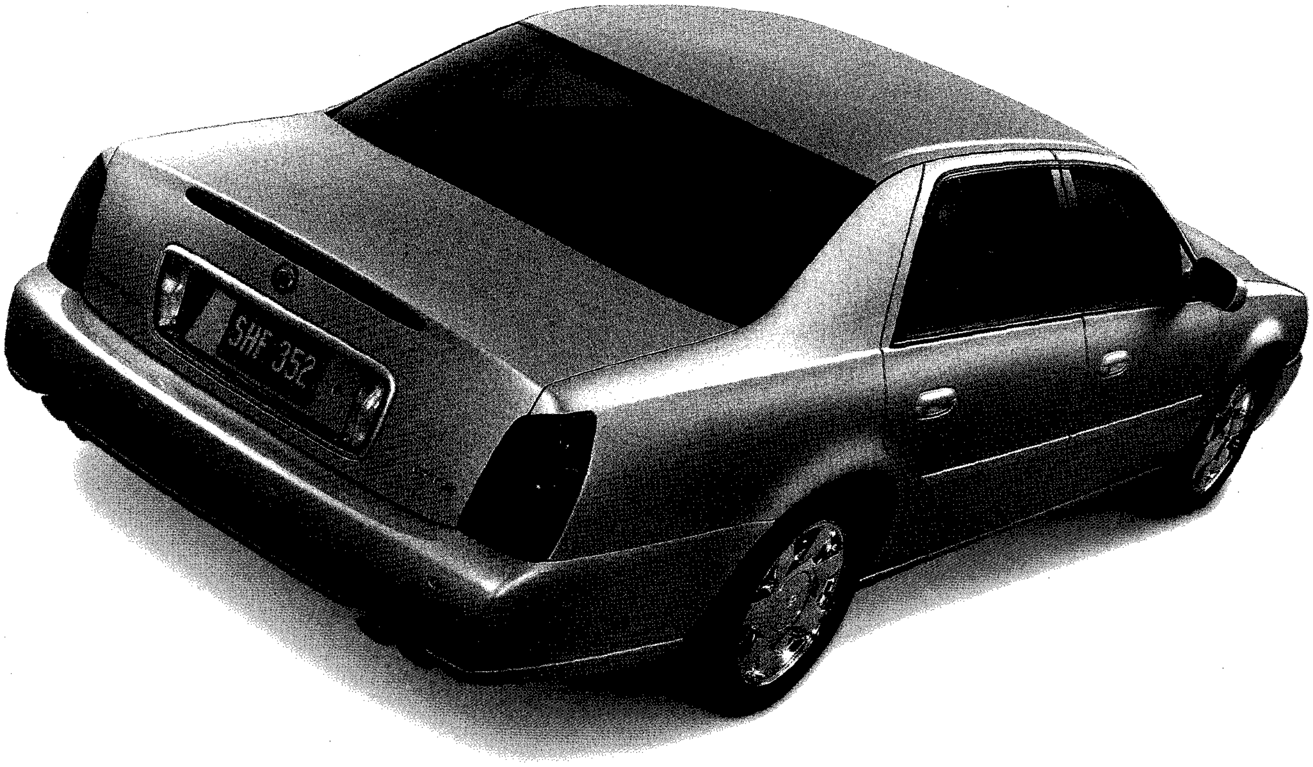

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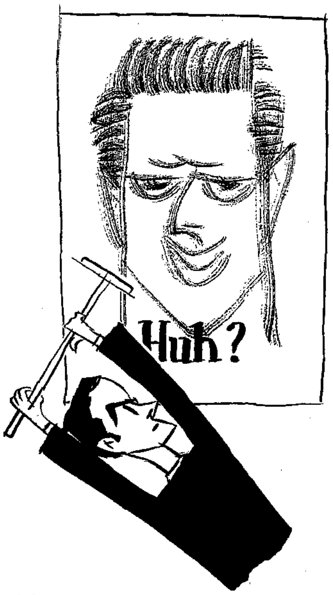
don't think I'd walk up and ask someone what they think." He looked some more. "But when you put things out there that just blend in, you become one of the 'they' entities. Like when people say, 'Hey, did you see "they" put up these posters?' You get to join the ranks of that élite club of people who do *everything*."

He was about to hop on his bike when something made him chuckle to himself. "The posters look like they'll be good to draw on," he explained. "Plenty of white space." The prospect of obscene graffiti seemed to please him.

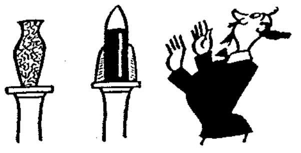


David Byrne

After he'd ridden off, people continued not to notice. Fifteen minutes of surveillance revealed little except the fact that most people walk with their heads down, especially on a chilly fall morning. But, finally, a young man wearing white face paint with a bit of fake blood dribbling from his lips stopped to check out the masks. His pronouncement: "Scary."

—*Zev Borow*

RECYCLING DEPT.
A SHRINE TO ALEXANDER'S



It isn't likely that many of the people who walk by the big hole at Third Avenue and Fifty-eighth Street where Alexander's department store once stood pause to mourn its loss, but those who do might consider heading a mile or so north to Barbara Jakobson's house. Jakobson, a collector of nineteen-sixties art and nineteen-fifties furniture, liked Alexander's. She didn't much admire the store's big white box of a building, but she has fond memories of what was affixed to it: an enormous art work by Stefan Knapp that consisted of about four hundred bright-colored enamel domes, each set on a square white enamel panel. The panels were attached in neat rows to the façade of the building, and the whole thing looked like a billboard filled with eyeballs or hubcaps or salad bowls. It was easily the most monumental piece of Op art in New York.

When Alexander's was torn down, in 1998, no one thought much either of the building or of Knapp's art. The battered remnants of it were left in the hands of the demolition contractor, who sold the bowls to anyone who came by. Four of them ended up at the Sixth Avenue flea market, where Mark McDonald, a dealer in mid-century decorative art, saw them. "They looked familiar, and it finally dawned on me that they were from Alexander's," McDonald said. "The guy said he had more of them back at his store, and I ended up buying about a hundred of them." McDonald put the bowls on display in his booth at the Modernism exposition at the Park Avenue Armory two years ago, and Barbara Jakobson wandered by. Unlike McDonald, Jakobson knew instantly what she was looking at.

"I just said, 'Oh, my God, it's Alexander's!' " Jakobson recalled. "I immediately went into a dead faint. Alexander's was a part of my family history. It was where my daughters bought their miniskirts and fake-fur coats."

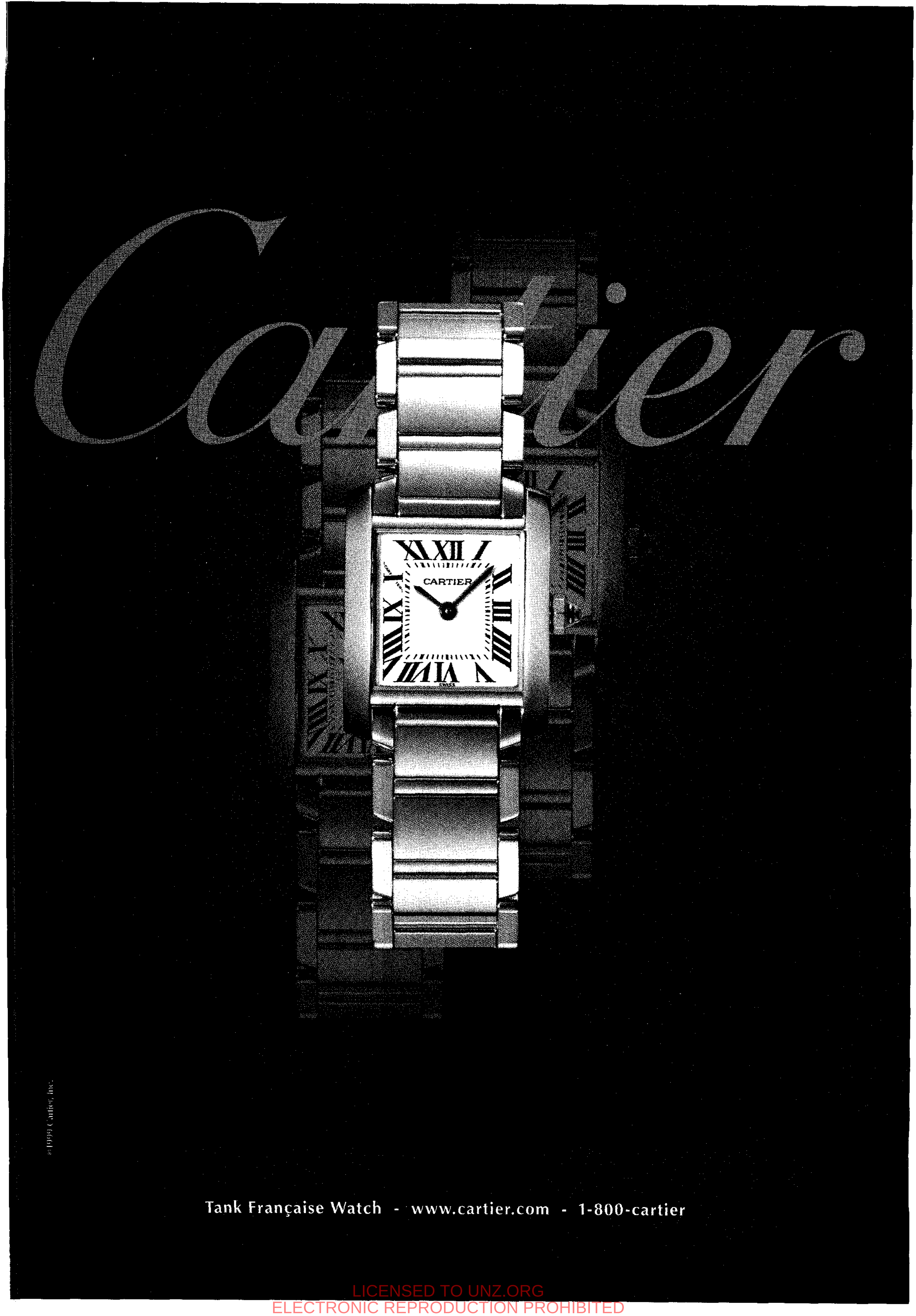
Jakobson knew she had to have the domes, and she knew what she wanted to do with them. She bought eighty of the best ones McDonald had—seventy-six small ones (a foot in diameter) and four large ones (two feet)—and she reconstructed Knapp's art work, or at least a substantial chunk of it, in the garden behind her town house.

"The garden used to be a dark hole," Jakobson said, and she decided that turning it into an homage to Alexander's would be just the thing to brighten it up. She wanted to create a mood that evoked another nineteen-sixties icon, the architect Edward Durell Stone. So she called his son, the architect Benjamin Hicks Stone, who recently restored the perforated concrete grille on his late father's landmark town house. Stone designed the garden as an elegant outdoor room, with sleek metal louvres set into the side walls and a rear wall of pink stucco. Knapp's bowls have been stuck into the rear wall, arranged by Jakobson in a pattern more or less resembling the Alexander's façade. Now, when you enter Jakobson's living room, you see her reconstituted Alexander's through a glass wall, juxtaposed with a pair of four-foot-high bears by Jeff Koons.

Stefan Knapp, who was born in Poland and worked mostly in England until his death, in 1996, would probably be pleased to find his work in Jakobson's home, along with that of artists like Frank Stella and Julian Schnabel. He never quite made it into the front ranks of abstract artists. But his work found particular favor with members of the Farkas family, the owners of Alexander's. In 1960, they commissioned him to create a mural made up of two hundred and eighty panels of swirling, enamelled color, two hundred feet long and fifty feet high, for the exterior of the Alexander's on Route 4 in Paramus, New Jersey. Unlike most pieces of abstract public art, Knapp's mural turned out to be wildly popular, and it emboldened the Farkases to do something similar in the construction of the Manhattan Alexander's.

That commission almost ended up going to Salvador Dali. One member of the Farkas family offered the job to Dali at the same time that another offered it to Knapp. The Farkases ultimately rejected Dali's idea of decorating the store's façade with images of giant giraffes, out of whose bodies enormous bureau drawers would slide. So the job went to Knapp, whose colorful abstraction had just the kind of cheerful exuberance that Alexander's wanted, and that Barbara Jakobson remembers. "In one of the models my architect made for the garden, he stencilled the word 'Alexander's' on the wall, but I didn't go that far," she said. "I was tempted—but I figured I can always add that later."

—*Paul Goldberger*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THE FINANCIAL PAGE

HOW MOUNTEBANKS BECAME MOGULS

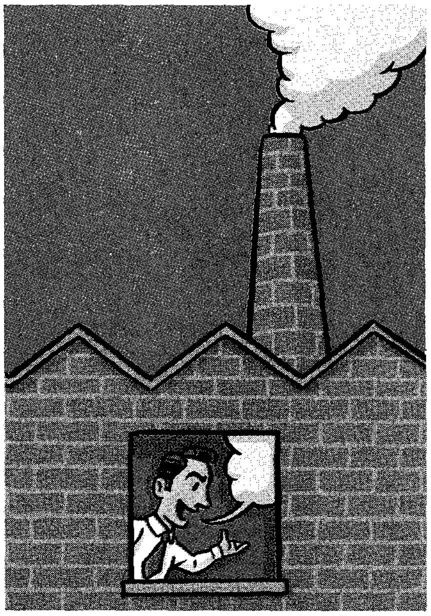
A decade from now, when we're all buying our power drills and our anniversary editions of "Tuesdays with Morrie" from Amazon and downloading our digital library of Jennifer Love Hewitt movies via the A.O.L.-Time Warner high-speed cable network, we may no longer remember the age of the story stock. But what an age it was, when businessmen perfected the art of turning blarney into billions, and companies whose main product wasn't servers or software but press releases acquired vast valuations. People nimble enough to get in and out at the right time became dynastically wealthy.

Today, we may have an easier time remembering that age, because it came to an end—let's say *officially*—just two weeks ago. The date was October 25th. Two things happened. First, after Nortel Networks announced that it had earned less than Wall Street had expected it to, the air started hissing out of the tech boom's last great bubble—the optical-networking sector. The folks in fibre no longer seemed invincible.

The other thing that happened was that C. Michael Armstrong, the head of A.T. & T., unveiled the company's scheme to "unlock shareholder value" by splitting into four separate stocks. It was the sort of yarn that the stock market had lapped up for much of the nineteen-nineties. But this time Wall Street shrugged, and A.T. & T.'s shares fell thirteen per cent. It was too late for tall tales. The nineties were over. Suddenly, investors have gone back to reading 10-Qs.

Now that value is supposedly back, it's easy to be dismissive of management by press release. But, when you think about it, the storytellers pulled off something remarkable. Instead of first building a business, then going public, they figured out that you could do it the other way around. They took the money, then set out to build the business. Of course, many companies realized that the first part of that process is a lot easier than the second. So, rather than bother with actually building a business, they merely propped up their stock price and attempted to use it to buy or bluff their way to the big time.

Hence the onslaught of road shows, CNBC appearances, and New Economy jive that sounded more like Arthur C. Clarke than Alfred Sloan. Take the idea of the I.P.O. as "branding event." Perhaps the credit for this one should go to Stephan Paternot and Todd Krizelman, the two silver-tongued young men who founded Theglobe.com, a Web site that sought to "replicate society." When Theglobe went public, in November of 1998, it held down the price of shares it sold. Because of this, the company raised less money than it could have. But what it got in exchange was a speculative mania in its shares, which rose six hundred per cent on the first day of trading. That, in turn, earned Theglobe's founding duo a ton of free press and put their company, which didn't really seem to do or earn much of anything, on the day traders' radar screen.



CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

So far, so good. These two men—or their bankers—seemed to realize that their customers weren't customers but, rather, the people who buy and flip stock. Their ticker symbol was their brand. Nor was it just the startups who told fabulous tales. Blue-chip companies did, too. They wove elaborate narratives about the wireless revolution, or the rise of the networked world and the disappearance of the personal computer. They carefully guided Wall Street analysts so that their performance was always slightly better than expected.

In the long run, of course, this is no way to run a business, and those who didn't understand that eventually saw their precious stock prices fall apart. Theglobe turned out to be just another Japanese lantern: paper-thin and full of hot air. But the big talker—"the entrepreneurial C.E.O. with a thespian bent," as the venture capitalist Bill Gurley once put it—was onto something. In the right hands, a pumped-up stock could be a formidable business tool. Companies could use it to buy other companies, attract hotshot employees, and raise extra capital to expand their operations. As Michael Mauboussin, the chief investment strategist for Credit Suisse First Boston, points out, "Instead of the stock price just reflecting a company's fundamentals, it actually started *affecting* the fundamentals."

But it was a dangerous game. If you smoked your own supply—if you believed your own hype—the market eventually wised up and you were caught out. The winners were the ones who took advantage of their irrational valuations to grow their own businesses and acquire assets of genuine value. Take Paternot and Krizelman, the globe guys. They were probably doomed from the start, but imagine if they had used their highflying stock to merge with a real company, like CNet. It's all in the timing: you've got to know when to go legit, when to turn sizzle into steak—when to parlay that quack patent-medicine potion into a bona-fide beverage empire (have a Coke and a smile). You could argue that this is what A.O.L. did when it hooked up with Time Warner. And you have to admire the way Cisco used its stock, which was trading at mind-boggling multiples, to buy its way into a position of market dominance that has made those multiples halfway plausible. The savvy entrepreneurs converted fool's gold into the 24k. kind. So who's the fool now?

—*James Surowiecki*

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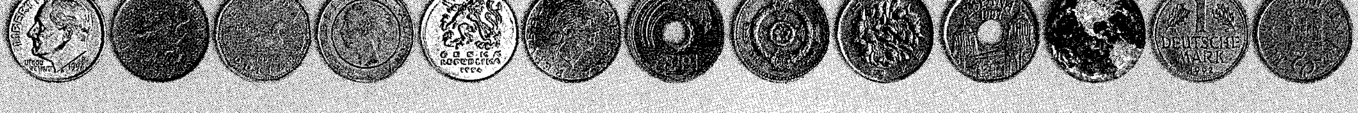

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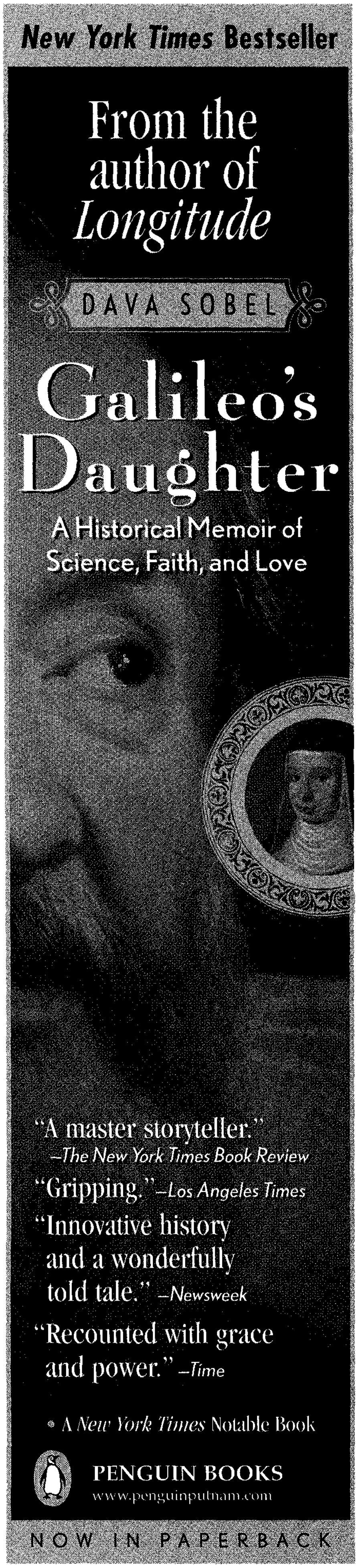
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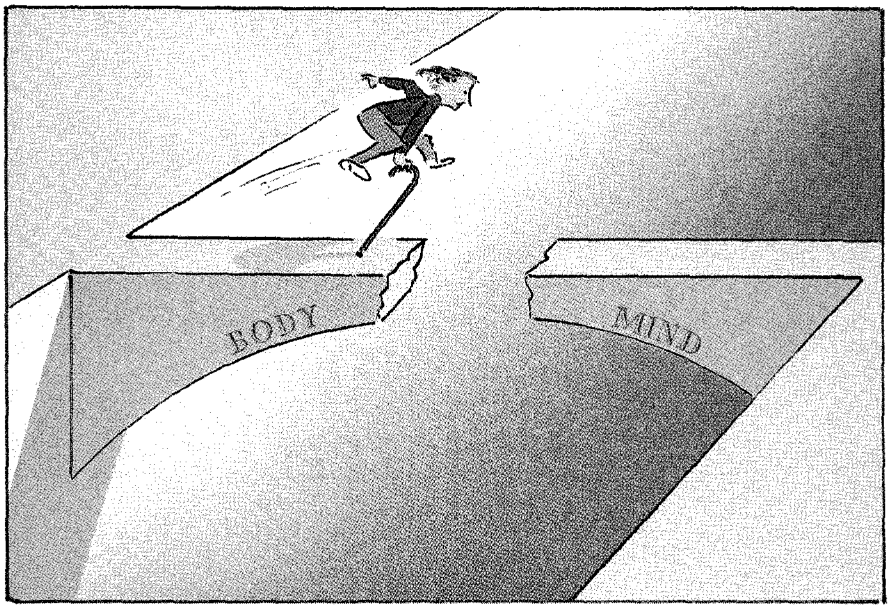
With so many people in so much pain, how could fibromyalgia not be a disease?

BY JEROME GROOPMAN



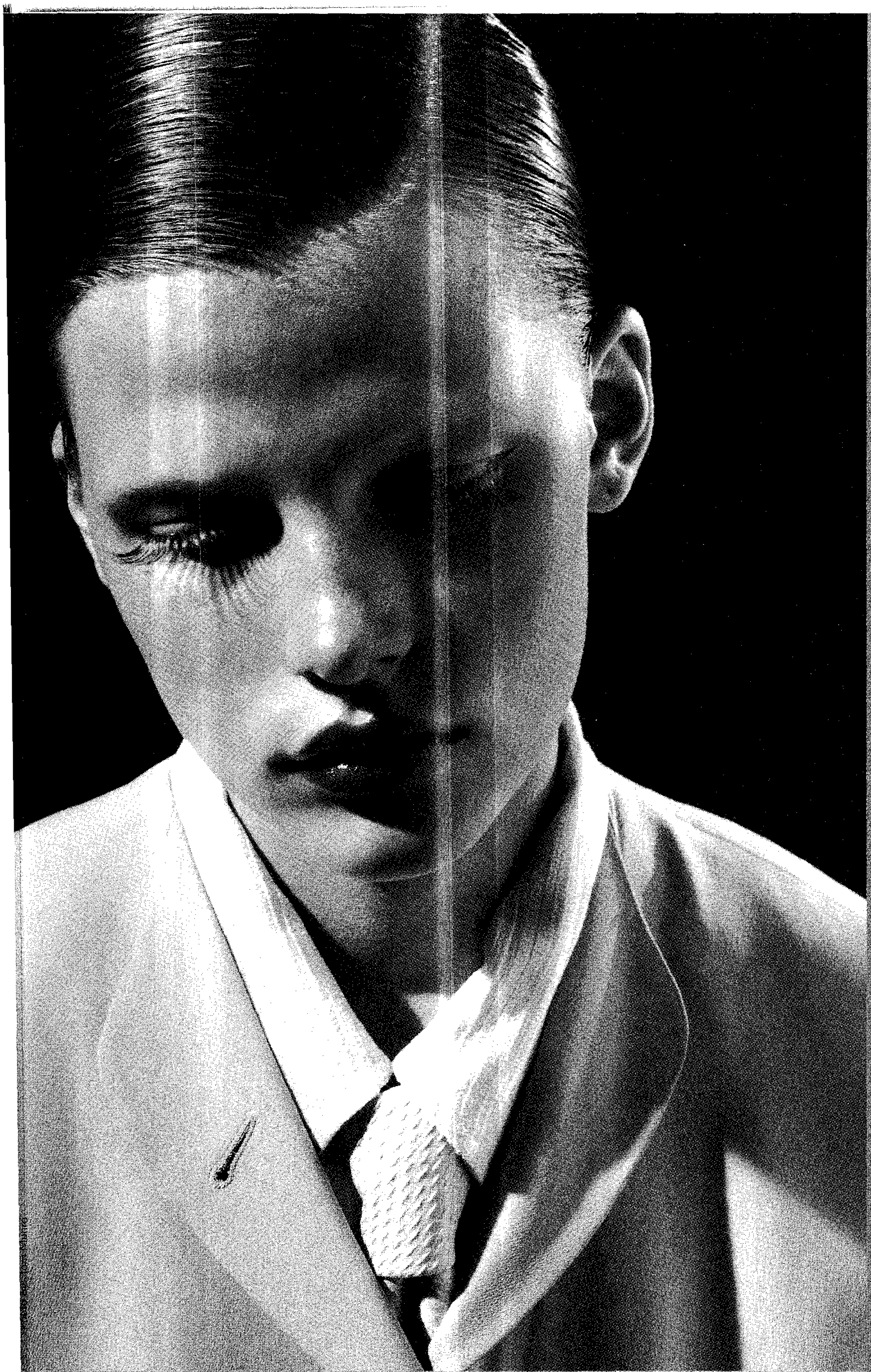
"I won't see any doctor who questions the legitimacy of what I have," one woman says.

In 1990, the term "fibromyalgia" formally entered the medical lexicon. It designated a condition of persistent muscle pain throughout the body, pain that is often accompanied by severe fatigue, insomnia, diarrhea and abdominal bloating, bladder irritation, and headache. Now, ten years later, nearly six million Americans are said to be suffering from fibromyalgia—more than four times as many as will develop cancer this year, and six times as many as are living with H.I.V. Ninety per cent of the afflicted are women, and the majority are Caucasian. Many cases follow a traumatic event, such as surgery, but others have no apparent cause.

Because of the vast number of people affected and the degree of debility it can cause, fibromyalgia has recently become a matter of national concern: it is featured with increasing regularity in newspapers and magazines and on television, and it is the focus of hundreds of Internet sites. Specialized clinics have been established, and pharmaceutical companies, realizing that the illness is chronic and therefore potentially lucrative, have been marketing to the afflicted. Support and advocacy organizations have lobbied Congress so effectively that the National Institutes of Health is now funnelling millions of dollars into fibromyalgia research. And yet virtually every aspect of this condition, down to its very name, is contested in the medical community. The debate over diagnosis and treatment has become so heated that it has polarized medical specialists; choosing a doctor has become tantamount to adopting an ideological position.

One of the first doctors to attempt to define the cluster of symptoms now known as fibromyalgia was Frederick Wolfe, the director of the Arthritis Research Center Foundation, in Wichita, Kansas, who became interested in the condition in the nineteen-seventies. Like many other rheumatologists, he was seeing an increasing number of patients who complained of diffuse muscle pain but who, upon physical examination, showed no evidence of inflammation; subsequent laboratory tests, X-rays,

GUY BILLOUT



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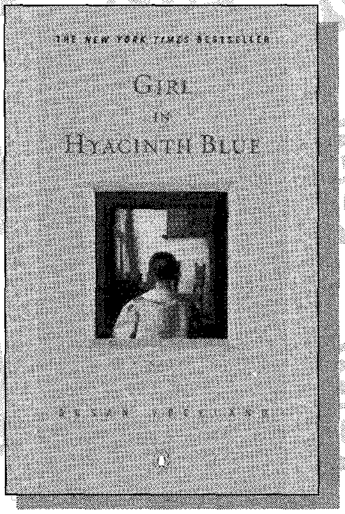

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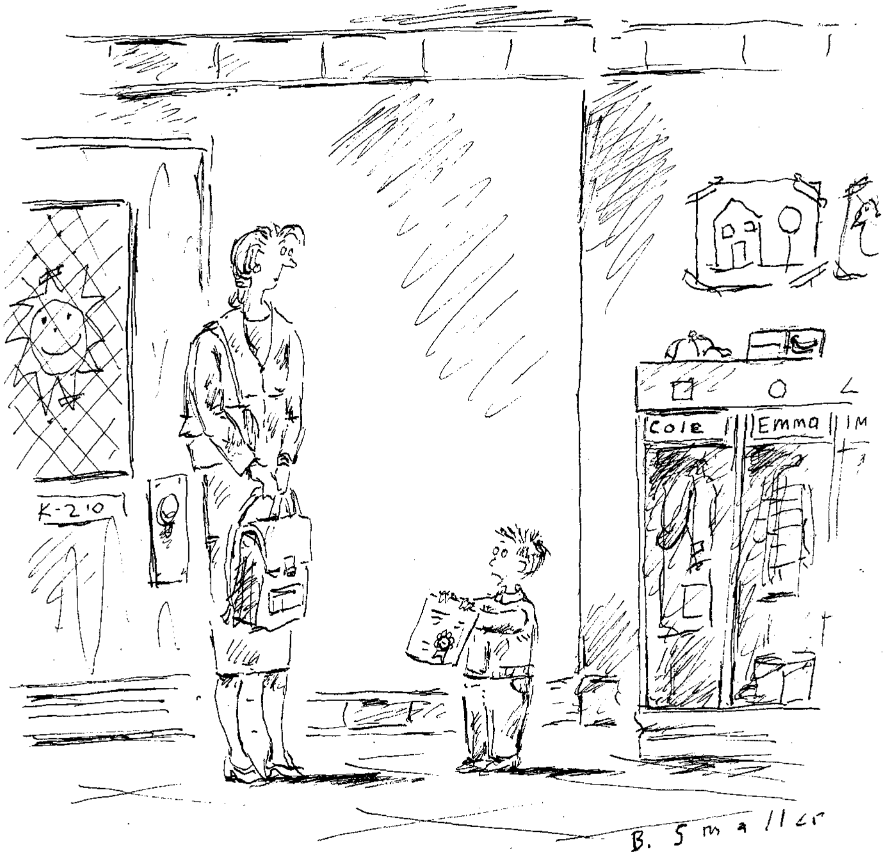
and tissue biopsies failed to show any muscle pathology. He found nothing in the clinical textbooks to explain these mysterious muscle complaints, so he decided to assess as many such patients as he could, and to enter the clinical data into his computer.

In 1987, Dr. Wolfe brought together twenty rheumatologists from across the United States and Canada to codify the unknown disorder. Its name is derived from the Greek "algia," meaning pain, "myo," indicating muscle, and the Latin "fibro," indicating the connective tissue of tendons and ligaments. Their diagnostic criteria were as follows: when a doctor firmly pressed on eighteen designated points where muscle, tendon, and ligament attach to bone, a patient who felt pain at eleven or more of those points had fibromyalgia. The American College of Rheumatology endorsed these criteria, and the fibromyalgia syndrome became an officially recognized disorder. At the time, Wolfe and his colleagues saw this as a great step forward: the criteria would not only enable doctors to make a diagnosis but also provide researchers with a defined population of patients, so that they could better search for a cause and methodically assess the risks and benefits of specific treatments.

Dr. Don Goldenberg, a professor of medicine at Tufts University School of Medicine, who helped Dr. Wolfe develop the criteria for fibromyalgia, has been the director of the Arthritis/Fibromyalgia Center at Newton-Wellesley Hospital since 1988, and he is considered one of the most passionate advocates for those who suffer from the condition. His commitment is rooted in personal experience. In the late seventies, his wife, Patty—"the most upbeat, outgoing person I know," Goldenberg says—became suddenly and inexplicably afflicted with pain, insomnia, and profound exhaustion. She was ultimately diagnosed with fibromyalgia.

Last spring, I attended an educational meeting that Dr. Goldenberg had organized for fibromyalgia patients in the Westin Hotel, just outside Boston. The meeting was free, its costs underwritten by pharmaceutical companies, which had set up marketing booths in the entryway. Nearly all the participants were



"I won it for being lice-free."

white women between the ages of twenty and sixty. Some walked with canes that had a four-point base, others wore braces on their wrists or ankles, and many limped. The cavernous hotel ballroom, which seats more than seven hundred and fifty people, was filled beyond capacity.

Goldenberg's opening slides addressed the concerns that he knew were on the minds of every patient in the audience: "What Is Fibromyalgia? A Medical Illness? A Syndrome? A Psychiatric Illness? Is It All in the Head?" "It's not all in the head," he declared. "Only a third of patients manifest major depression, anxiety, or panic. It becomes a chicken-and-egg problem. People are anxious and depressed from their pain and their suffering. Labelling fibromyalgia a psychiatric illness is stigmatizing." How could there be no disease, he asked, when those afflicted are in such pain? He cited cases of fibromyalgia that have followed viral infections, like the flu, physical injuries, or emotional traumas, and then likened the pain to that of a phantom limb: "Whatever trauma initially triggered fibromyalgia is long gone. But the pain persists."

Goldenberg criticized physicians who were skeptical of the condition and who dismissed it—along with chronic fatigue and irritable bowel—as a "wastebasket" syndrome, meaning it does not fit into established categories of physical disease. The message implicit in such a term is that the patient's symptoms are clinically insignificant, a hodgepodge of complaints without physical explanation. In this forum, however, such patients would not be dismissed. "You are not crazy," he assured his listeners.

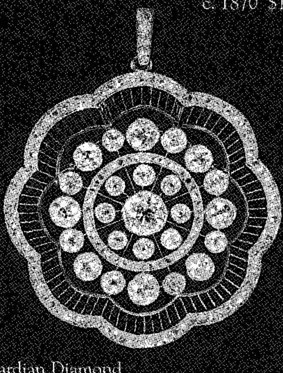
Goldenberg then introduced Dr. Robert Bennett. Bennett is a rheumatologist who was a member of Wolfe's criteria team and is now the chairman of the division of arthritis and rheumatic diseases at the Oregon Health Sciences University, in Portland. He told the audience that Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite and the founder of the prizes that bear his name, suffered from fibromyalgia and irritable-bowel syndrome. A slide showed a quotation from Nobel's writings: "I am more seriously ill than my doctors think." Bennett looked at the audience. "Statements like that make it sound like you and Nobel are all hypochondriacs." There was nervous laughter in the audience.

New data, Bennett said, proved otherwise. Using a series of graphs, diagrams, and images of brain scans to illustrate his argument, Bennett said that people with fibromyalgia have a number of neurochemical and circulatory abnormalities that make them unusually sensitive to pain. "I believe the answer is that you suffer from a disorder of sensory processing, so there is amplification of sensory nerve impulses—increased input from muscles, bowel, bladder, and the organs of taste and smell." The complexity of Bennett's data did not blunt the eager attentiveness of the audience: here at last was a plausible explanation for a maddeningly elusive condition.

Not long after the conference, I visited Dr. Goldenberg in his office at Newton-Wellesley Hospital. About fifteen patients a week are referred to him for evaluation of symptoms that indicate fibromyalgia; one of the patients I met was a woman I will call Paula Cortez, a thirty-four-year-old of Portuguese heritage from a mill town in southern Massachusetts. A large woman with auburn hair and brown eyes, Mrs. Cortez offered a tentative smile as Dr. Goldenberg greeted her in the waiting room. She let go of her five-year-old son's hand and walked slowly into the office, leaning on a four-point cane.

Dr. Goldenberg listened intently as Mrs. Cortez recounted her story. In 1995, when she was five months pregnant, she developed a pain in her hips so intense that she was unable to walk. The pain did not abate after her son was born; in fact, it spread "everywhere in my body, from the neck down." She saw many doctors and had numerous blood tests and three M.R.I. scans. All these evaluations were negative for any bone, joint, or muscle disease. The pain was worst in her back. "I feel like I have two knives stuck in there," she explained. This makes it impossible for her to sleep for more than an hour or two at a time. Such "non-restorative" sleep is characteristic of fibromyalgia, Dr. Goldenberg said.

Mrs. Cortez thought that perhaps the baby had depleted her calcium levels, and so she began drinking large amounts of calcium-enriched orange juice and took calcium supplements, but without effect. She takes Motrin and Tylenol



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strengthened with codeine for the pain, and sleeping pills for her insomnia. She has also been given different psychiatric medications by her primary-care physician, and recently began taking Prozac. "Now I have a big pharmacy in my house," she said. Nothing, however, works particularly well.

"Sometimes when I go to the doctor, he doesn't spend more than five minutes with me," Mrs. Cortez said. Her experience with a chiropractor was similarly unhelpful. "He moved me like this," she said, making a twisting maneuver with her hands. "It didn't get me better." Dr. Goldenberg asked if she thought she was depressed. "Of course I am depressed—my house is a mess, my life is a mess. I don't work. I don't have any money. I have no social life."

When I asked about her husband, she looked away, and then explained that when she got married, in 1991, her husband was not a legal immigrant and didn't have a green card, so he couldn't work: "We were fighting all the time. I felt trapped." Mrs. Cortez said she had begun to put on weight, and over the past eight years had gained some eighty pounds. Her husband was unsympathetic to her condition. "It's hard when you have tests and the tests don't show anything," she said. They are now separated.

We moved to the examining room. Mrs. Cortez exhibited no evidence of arthritis, and seemed to have full range of motion in her fingers, wrists, elbows, and neck, and even in her painful hips. Dr. Goldenberg then explained to Mrs. Cortez that he was going to apply pressure to different parts of her body. "If you feel pain, not just pressure, when I press, then tell me. Say the word out loud—'pain.' " Dr. Goldenberg began at her wrists, exerting with trained fingers nine pounds of pressure, in accordance with the criteria of the American College of Rheumatology.

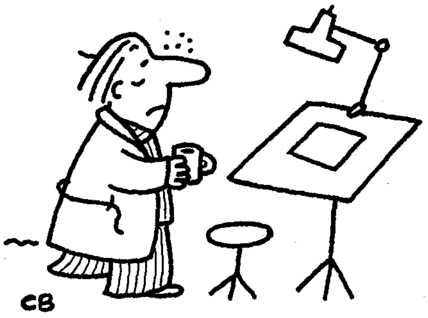
"Oh—pain. Pain. Pain." At nearly every point, Mrs. Cortez winced.

"Mrs. Cortez, you have fibromyalgia," Dr. Goldenberg said. An expression of relief crossed her face.

Language is as vital to the physician's art as the stethoscope or the scalpel. A doctor begins by examining the words of his patient to determine their clinical significance. He then translates the words into medical language, describing how the condition came to be, what it means, and how it may evolve. Of all the words a doctor uses, the name he gives the illness has the greatest weight. It forms the foundation of all subsequent discussion, not only between doctor and patient but also between doctor and doctor and between patient and patient. With a name, the patient can construct an explanation of his illness not only for others but for himself. The name of the illness becomes part of the identity of the sufferer—"P.W.A." (person with AIDS), or "cancer survivor"—and indicates the status the person has gained from his experience; it is shorthand for his odyssey, akin to "veteran of foreign wars" or, in Muslim lands, "hajji," for one who has made the hajj. The name can also provide an instant community.

At the end of the afternoon, I accompanied Dr. Goldenberg to a small conference room adjoining his office, where Mrs. Cortez and several other patients he had just evaluated were assembled. "There are no known cures for fibromyalgia, although charlatans promise them," Dr. Goldenberg said. "And while it is usually a chronic condition, there is hope of alleviating the symptoms. Low doses of tricyclic antidepressants, like Elavil, can be beneficial. So can a gradual program of exercise. Pain medicines like Ultram may afford relief. We work as a multidisciplinary team here with a psychiatrist down the hall and a physiatrist." In essence, Dr. Goldenberg's care consisted of judicious doses of psychotropic medicines and analgesics, a graduated exercise program, and—perhaps most significant—the promise that the patient's suffering would be taken seriously.

I left Dr. Goldenberg's office wondering how Mrs. Cortez's experience might compare with that of someone of a different socioeconomic and educational background. I spoke with a close friend of some thirty years, a fifty-one-year-old woman I'll call Liz Albright. Liz, who teaches at an élite New England college, has received a diagnosis of fibromyalgia with associated chronic-fatigue and irritable-bowel syndromes. Her troubles began in 1994, after she underwent surgery for sinus infections. She never recovered her sense of well-being, and suffered from insomnia, fatigue, headaches, and deep muscle aches in her arms and chest. "My internist told me that it was all tension, that I'm middle-aged, and reacting to the stress of raising two kids, five and eight," she said. At that time, she had other stresses as well. She had recently been divorced, and she and her ex-husband closed a business they had managed together.



Liz had had episodes of depression in the past, but this felt very different. One specialist she consulted thought that her pituitary gland might have been nicked during the sinus surgery, but extensive endocrinologic testing showed otherwise. A gastroenterologist suggested that she might have celiac disease, or sprue—a rare allergic reaction to the gluten in wheat, rye, and barley—and Liz underwent endoscopies of her stomach, small bowel, and colon, and multiple analyses of stool to try to confirm the diagnosis. "When all the tests came back negative for sprue, he completely lost interest in me," she said. She came to Boston and saw other specialists, none of whom could do more than offer the diagnosis of fibromyalgia and chronic-fatigue syndrome.

Liz's experience of being shunted from doctor to doctor is typical. In the era of managed care, doctors have neither the time nor the incentive to listen to a seemingly endless list of inexplicable symptoms. Fibromyalgia patients often set off a game of clinical hot potato, with each doctor eager to pass the patient on to a colleague as quickly as possible. One doctor referred to these patients as "the bane of the medical profession."

Unable to get help from physicians, Liz turned in desperation to alternative healers. A Vietnamese monk performed acupuncture, which was of no apparent benefit. A chiropractor told her that a car accident she had had at the age of sixteen had "messed up" her neck: "Crack, crack, he moved me around, took several hundred dollars, and tried to sell me pillows." An osteopath told her that she would

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be on painkillers for the rest of her life.

Liz now goes to a local internist. "The first thing I said to him was 'You need to believe I am really sick, not just complaining.'" For her fatigue, she was given Ritalin, and for her insomnia she was given Ambien. "I am probably addicted," she said, "but the doctor keeps giving them because he has no answers." Recently, she began taking Prozac, but it has not made much difference. She closely follows reports on the Internet and in fibromyalgia and chronic-fatigue newsletters, searching for possible solutions. "I've tried everything," she went on. "I have two shelves in my kitchen cabinet that contain every supplement imaginable. I've taken coenzyme Q10. I taught myself to inject bovine-liver extract. Because some people think it is hormonal, I took birth-control pills to try to even out symptoms of menopause. But they were not beneficial." Liz, who was reared as an Episcopalian but is a longtime agnostic, wondered whether will power and prayer might help her. "I went on the road to Damascus, but that hasn't helped, either." Finally, last year, she gave in and took time off from teaching because of the pain, fatigue, and episodes of what is commonly referred to as "fibro-fog," or an inability to think clearly.

We talked about the nomenclature, and about how fibromyalgia seems to be merging with chronic-fatigue syndrome. "Chronic fatigue has become a humiliating term—the yuppie disease, begging to be laughed at," Liz said. "Fibromyalgia is more socially acceptable." When I mentioned that doctors call fibromyalgia a wastebasket diagnosis, she bristled: "They'd love to throw me away."

ON FIRST HEARING OF YOUR CONCEPTION

Premature no doubt, my heading north
through the kitchen to the dining room
which is south but also west depending on
whether one is going forward to the future
or backward toward the middle of what
used to be my life in the shadows of the
living room which is now a place you will
pass through on your way to grander things.
Indeed, one must ponder the importance of
this autumn light which seems more robust
in each window. Yes, I'm walking in circles
while your mother reads about the drama
of evolution which took its time building
toward its dénouement from amoebae to
somersaulting the hectic surf of our most
epic journey. Weigh each drip of gravity,
lift the tiny idea of your arms, defy the odds,
evolve.

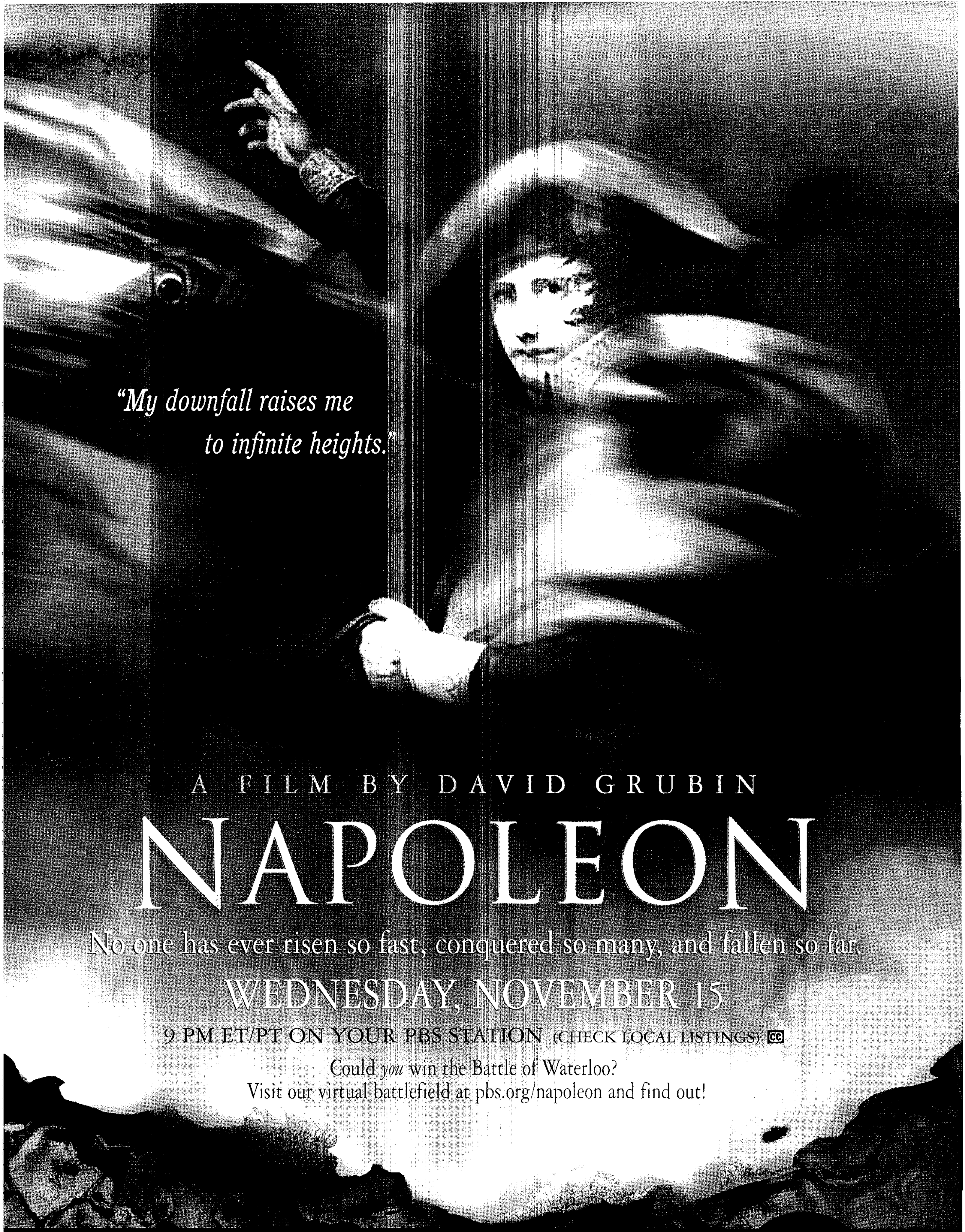
—*Philip Schulz*

Careless and disparaging language can certainly further alienate patients who are in desperate need of care, and yet opponents of the current treatment of fibromyalgia say that unquestioning acceptance of the condition may be equally harmful. Some, like Dr. Thomas Bohr, a neurologist at Loma Linda University School of Medicine, in California, and Dr. Arthur Barsky, a professor of psychiatry at Harvard, contend that even honoring this bundle of symptoms with a medical label may be doing more to make people sick than to cure them. These doctors don't claim that the symptoms of fibromyalgia are not real, only that their origin lies in the mind and not in the peripheral nerves of the body.

But what about the physiological research cited by Dr. Robert Bennett? Like many other neurologists, Dr. Bohr considers these studies deeply flawed. "It is well established that depression, anxiety, and other disorders show abnormalities on scans and in biochemical markers," he told me. "You need as controls people with comparable psychiatric problems and levels of distress." Each year, he continued, there is excitement about the discovery of some new chemical or protein in the brain. "First there was serotonin, then growth hormone, and now substance P. None of the data are convincing," Bohr said. He also disputes the analogy Goldenberg draws between fibromyalgia and phantom-limb pain. "With phantom limb, you have a real lesion—the limb has been cut off! Nerves and muscle and bone are damaged. People with fibromyalgia have intact limbs and no evidence of pathology like severed tissues." Moreover, with fibromyalgia the pain is not localized in an area of past injury but generalized throughout the body, and cannot be explained by the anatomical connections of nerves to brain.

Many Americans suffer the symptoms associated with fibromyalgia, according to Dr. Barsky: he cites data showing that a third of healthy people at any one time will have aches and pains in their muscles, and a fifth will report significant fatigue. Furthermore, nearly ninety per cent of a general healthy population report at least one somatic symptom, like headache, joint ache, muscle stiffness, or diarrhea, in any two-to-four-week period. A typical adult has one such symptom every four to six days. Barsky thinks that for people prone to fibromyalgia the everyday somatic symptoms become a growing focus of attention. "They become trapped in the belief that their symptoms are due to disease, with future expectations of debility and doom. This enhances their vigilance about their body, and thus the intensity of their symptoms."

Barsky traces fibromyalgia back to the nineteenth century, to neurasthenia, a condition of severe nervous exhaustion. "Over different historical times, these syndromes rise, morph into one another, subside, and then reëmerge before our eyes. They are manifestations of the same sociocultural process. Only now, with the Internet and mass media, they spread more quickly and more widely." He also points out that there are powerful groups with vested interests in the perpetuation of these syndromes, including doctors and other practitioners



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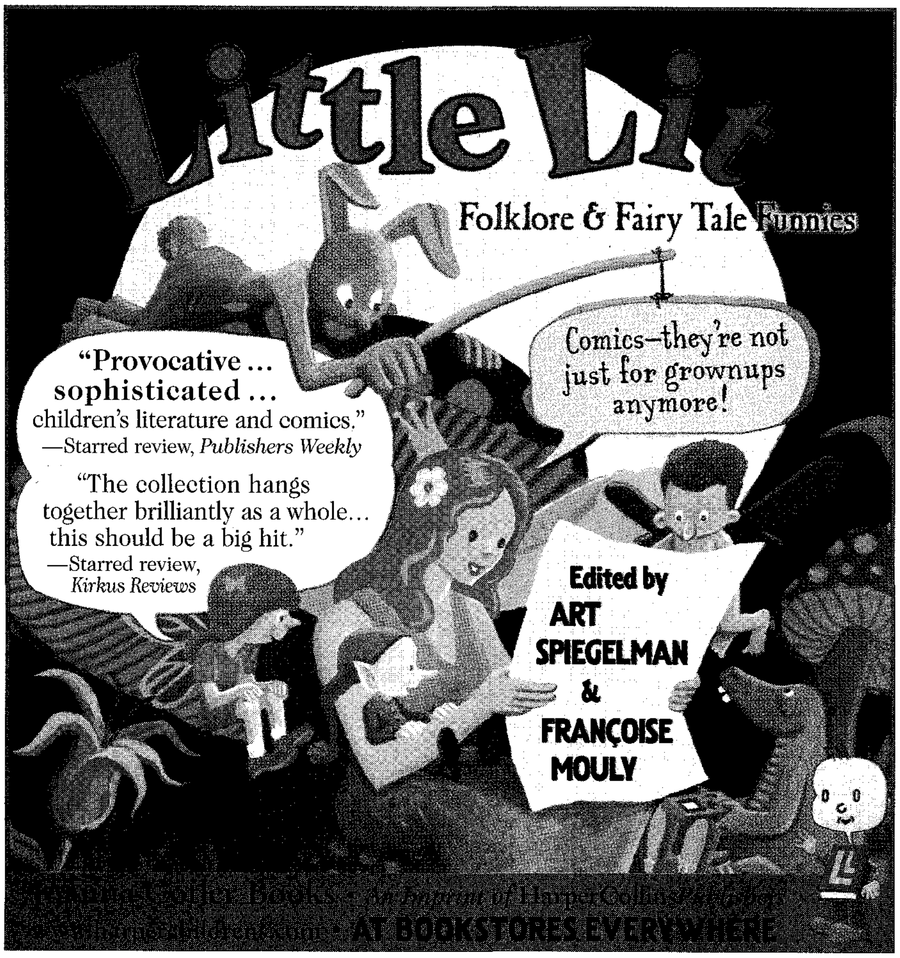
who run clinics, lawyers involved in disability litigation, and drug companies marketing treatments of unsubstantiated benefit. This locks the patient into a closed circle of belief.

Dr. Bohr is distressed that even responsible medical advocates who believe in the syndrome have been able to do very little for their patients. During the late eighties and nineties, a group of researchers that included Goldenberg and Wolfe monitored more than five hundred patients who were receiving care at some of the top fibromyalgia centers in America. After seven to ten years, there was no significant diminution in pain, psychological distress, or degree of disability. "I'm labelled as Dr. Unempathy, because I scientifically criticize the label 'fibromyalgia,'" Bohr said. "But these people are not being helped, and they desperately need to be helped. We have to change the words. We have a huge problem with Descartes here. I am a monist. I don't split mind and body. In America, physical disease travels first class, but psychiatric disorders are considered less than coach—they are cargo. We can call it a chronic-pain syndrome, or drop the stigma and see it as linked to a psychological disorder."

Both Bohr and Barsky believe that learned behavior can be unlearned, and that a reclassification of the syndrome could encourage new approaches to treatment. Recent studies in England, for example, in which cognitive-behavioral techniques were applied to those suffering from chronic-fatigue syndrome, have been very promising. First, patients are told that they cannot injure themselves by engaging in tasks that increase their pain. (This is contrary to the general assumption that pain is a physiological red flag.) They are challenged to perform increasingly strenuous activities and are shown that they have the physical capacity needed to complete them. This experience shifts their focus away from their symptoms and somehow reduces their perception of pain and fatigue. Nearly two-thirds of the study's participants improved in their ability to work, compared with only one-fifth in the controls; three-quarters were assessed to have a satisfactory outcome versus one-quarter who were treated with the usual therapies.

Dr. Barsky is trying to conduct a con-



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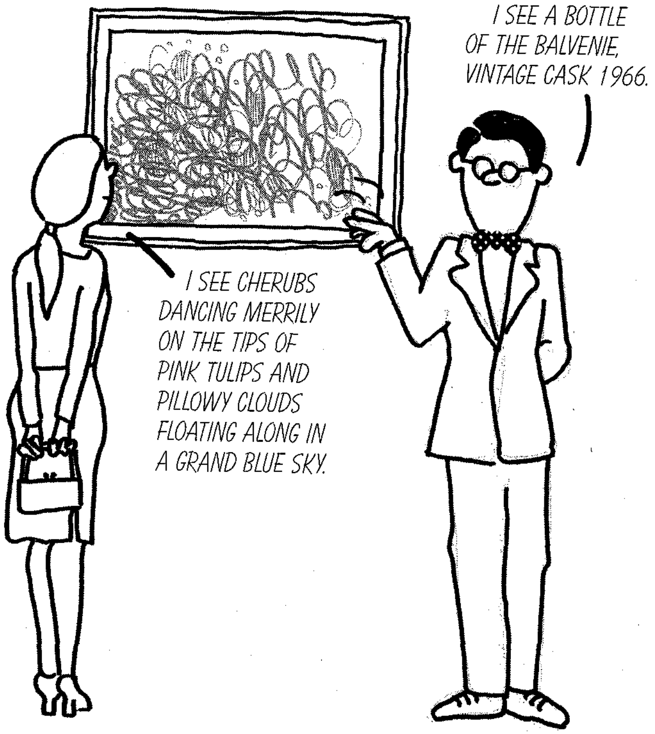
trolled study similar to the ones done in England. Unfortunately, he has found it difficult to attract volunteers: many patients who have been approached have declined or are not eligible because they are taking certain medications or are involved in compensation litigation. Not long after speaking to him, I called Liz Albright, and told her that there were several studies suggesting significant benefits from cognitive-behavioral therapy. "The distress I have is from my illness, not from social forces," she replied. Her voice cracked, and she paused for a moment to compose herself. "It's like being in prison in your body." She would never see someone like Dr. Barsky, she explained. "I won't see any doctor who questions the legitimacy of what I have."

Perhaps the most unlikely opponent of the fibromyalgia diagnosis I encountered was Dr. Frederick Wolfe, the very man who helped bring the term into being. Now he wishes that he could make it disappear. Although he describes Dr. Goldenberg as a "saint" for his dedication, he has largely embraced the position articulated by Bohr and Barsky. "For a moment in time, we thought we had discovered a new physical disease," he said. "But it was the emperor's new clothes. When we started out, in the eighties, we saw patients going from doctor to doctor with pain. We believed that by telling them they had fibromyalgia we reduced stress and reduced medical utilization. This idea, a great, humane idea that we can interpret their distress as fibromyalgia and help them—it didn't turn out that way. My view now is that we are creating an illness rather than curing one."

His experience suggests that the number of tender points in patients with fibromyalgia correlates most closely with their degree of unhappiness: many of his patients have a history of psychiatric illness, smoking, obesity, marital trouble, or childhood sexual abuse. "When I press, I am not just saying, 'Does that hurt,' " he told me. "I am saying, 'How is your life?' " Dr. Wolfe believes that an often cited study claiming that there is no higher incidence of psychiatric illness among patients with fibromyalgia than there is among general medical patients is flawed, since the control group had a very high rate of psychological ill-



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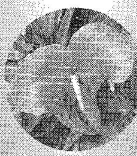

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ness compared with the general population. "I do believe there are some people who hurt all over and have no psychiatric disorder," Wolfe says. And he also believes that his fibromyalgia patients are experiencing genuine pain. "But, if you give them the diagnosis of fibromyalgia, pain is allowed to dominate their life. By receiving this diagnosis and taking medications, people become card-carrying members of the fibromyalgia club."

The proliferation of legal cases concerning fibromyalgia and its possible causes is a source of great irritation to Wolfe. Fibromyalgia is a very convenient diagnosis for lawyers to use in arguing for disability, since it is essentially self-reported. Data from a study Wolfe did of 1,604 patients at six medical centers indicate that more than a quarter of fibromyalgia patients receive disability payments. In Wichita, before the American College of Rheumatology criteria for fibromyalgia were introduced, the disease accounted for less than twenty-five per cent of Social Security disability awards; afterward that figure increased to forty-six per cent. "Lawyers call me and ask, 'Does the patient have fibromyalgia?' I know that if he doesn't have it he will soon."

Wolfe says that it's not that people lie; it's simply that, in these cases, there is no objective measure of who is ill and who is not. Wolfe would be the first to acknowledge that the diagnostic criteria for fibromyalgia have not fulfilled their original purpose. How, then, should doctors respond to its spread? "If we underplay this, it will come down to a more minor level or disappear. We should diagnose it less. I think we should stop using the 'F' word with patients, since it doesn't help them get better." Wolfe paused. "Of course, not using the word doesn't mean that they will get better, either."

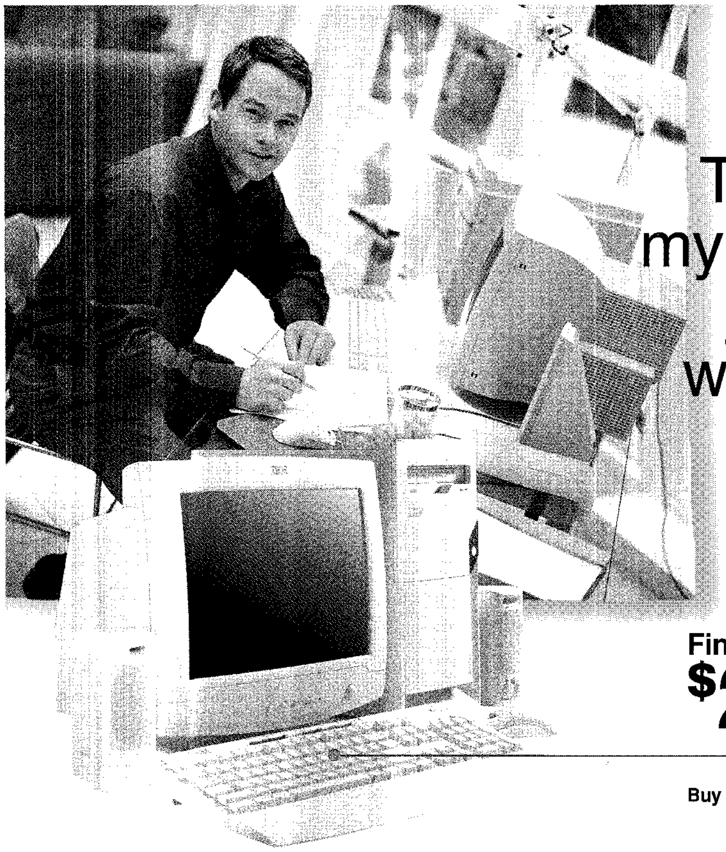
Wolfe's pessimism was not unusual; the anger and despair engendered by fibromyalgia have infected physicians as well as patients. In fact, fibromyalgia has become such a contentious medical topic that most of the doctors I spoke with specified that their views were off the record. Some feared that any hint of sympathy would cause a deluge of referrals; others worried that voicing skepticism about the syndrome would make them vulnerable to public attack. Dr. Bohr, for example, has received more than two hundred pieces of hate mail, and has been lambasted by fibromyalgia advocates on the Internet and in newsletters.

Many doctors were also gloomy about the long-term prognosis for fibromyalgia sufferers; the published data on patients like Paula Cortez and Liz Albright—patients who have been cared for in specialty rheumatology clinics and have received the usual combination of psychiatric medication, analgesics, and stretching exercises—have been extremely discouraging. And yet these same doctors regularly refer patients to clinicians like Dr. Goldenberg. They are ready to forgo the income and tacitly endorse a generic program in order to park the patient with someone who believes in the malady and is willing to oversee a condition that is not likely to improve.

"I was distracted for a moment. Go on."

The vocabulary of medicine is woefully inadequate when it comes to describing the complex interactions between mind and body. Although we are gradually accepting their interconnectedness (it is all right to say, for example, "I am under a lot of stress at work, and my lower back is killing me"), no terms exist to describe how physical experience—Liz Albright's sinus surgery, Paula Cortez's pregnancy—is imprinted on the molecules in the brain. No terms explain how emotion and perception—thoughts and fears and uncertainties, formed by electrical charges at neuronal synapses and by hormones on cellular receptors—transform themselves into what we feel as physical pain. So we fall back on language that is incomplete, encompassing only fragments of a biology beyond our comprehension. While we claim to be monists, we still think in terms of soma and psyche, and these ancient words inform our approach to therapy.

Daniel Rooks, who directs the Be Well program at Boston's Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, has sought to move away from the divisions over nomenclature and meaning. Forty-three years old, with thinning black hair, wire-rim glasses, and a precise manner, Rooks has a doctorate in physiology and a special interest in how exercise may alleviate pain and improve mobility in patients with rheumatic diseases. In the past, he has worked primarily with patients who have osteoarthritis; recently, however, he has seen more and more patients with fibromyalgia. A newcomer to the field, he was shocked not only by how much misinformation he found on the Web but also by the mantra-like insistence among patients and doctors alike that it is a chronic disorder. Without any pathology in muscles or tendons, he thought, why conclude that the prognosis is so dire? He set out



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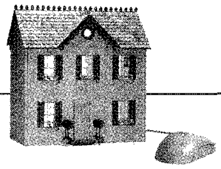

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to prove that patients could get better.

In 1998, he did a controlled twenty-week study. The population he studied was physiologically and psychologically heterogeneous: "tall and short, heavy and thin, wired and laid back, senior V.P.s in major companies and people who are homemakers." Seventy-eight patients who had received a diagnosis of fibromyalgia (many of whom had been followed for years by rheumatologists) entered the trial. Fifty-six completed it, and the results were extremely encouraging. The study included a three-times-a-week program of escalating cardiovascular exercise and flexibility and strength training. In addition, a discussion group with very strict rules was set up: "It was not a gripe session about how angry everyone feels toward doctors, or how nothing has helped, but a discussion of how to problem-solve." After twenty weeks, the patients showed a statistically significant increase in upper- and lower-body strength, a decrease in pain and fatigue, and an increase in over-all level of functioning—all objectively measured.

Rooks feels that to debate the appropriateness of the label "fibromyalgia" now, ten years after it was coined, is almost beside the point. "The term won't change soon," he says. "What is key is that I tell the patients I accept them for who they are—we're not judgmental." In essence, the Rooks program is a form of cognitive behavioral therapy, but, unlike Barsky's, it is not presented as such: rather, it is cast outside the mind-versus-body paradigm. In his program, one could say, action precedes rather than follows from language. "You don't tell the patients they can get well—you show them," Rooks says. "This is what finally breaks down the barriers in the mind. The person proves to himself every time he does the exercise that he can succeed." The next step is for Rooks to determine how long the improvements last and what can be done to sustain them.

Fibromyalgia has largely been defined by physicians. Rooks's study has shifted the focus of patients' hopes away from the medical establishment, and this can be liberating. "What was most gratifying for the patients was that they were doing something for themselves that made them better," Rooks told me. "They saw they did not have to be so dependent on doctors." ♦

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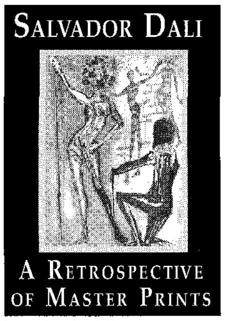
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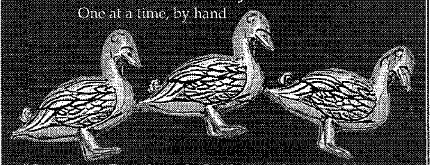

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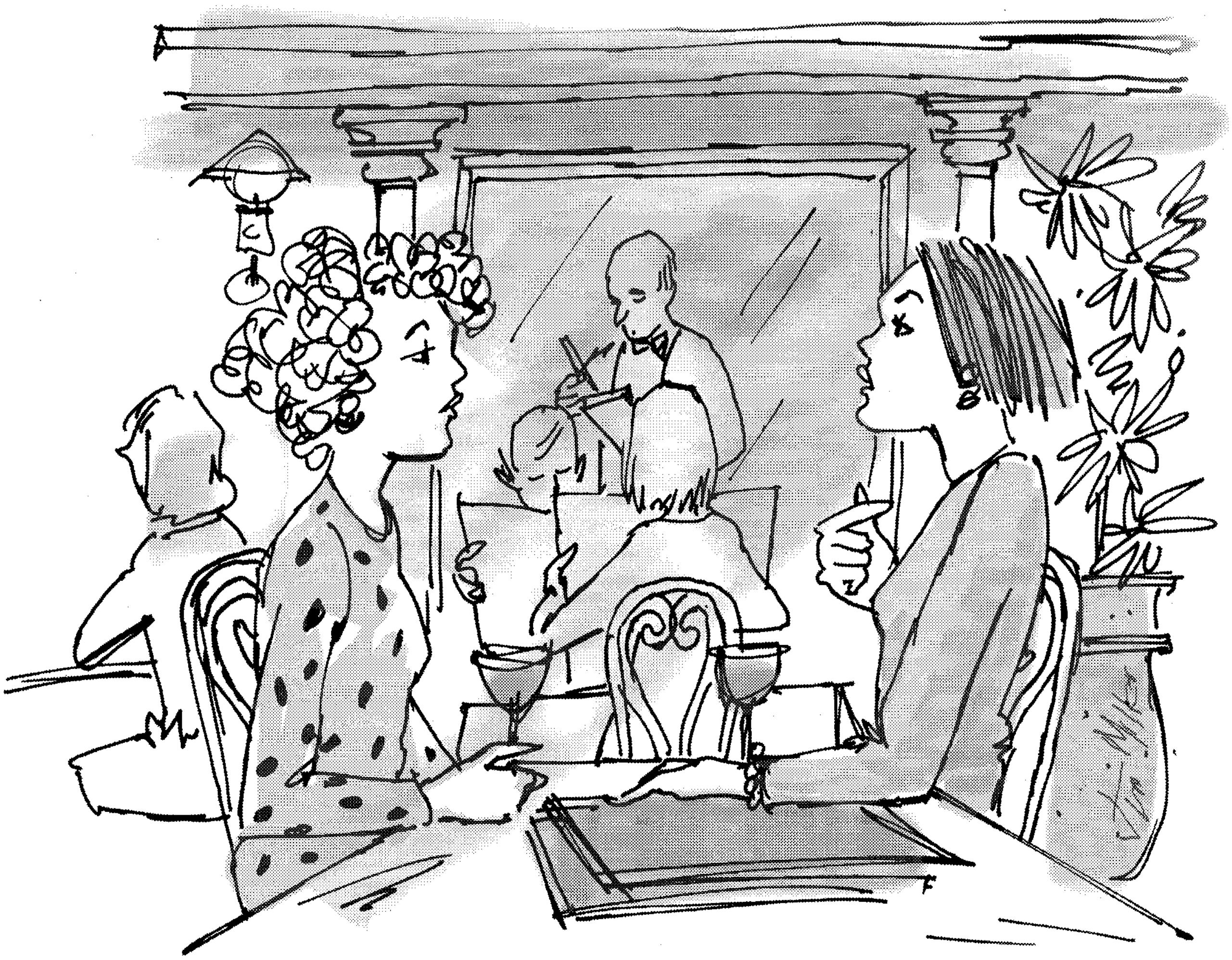


“So I told him, take the trust fund, the house in Deep River, the BMW and the Mercedes. But I’m not giving up the cocker spaniel or ‘The Lion King’ tickets.”

THE POLITICAL SCENE

THE PROVOCATEUR

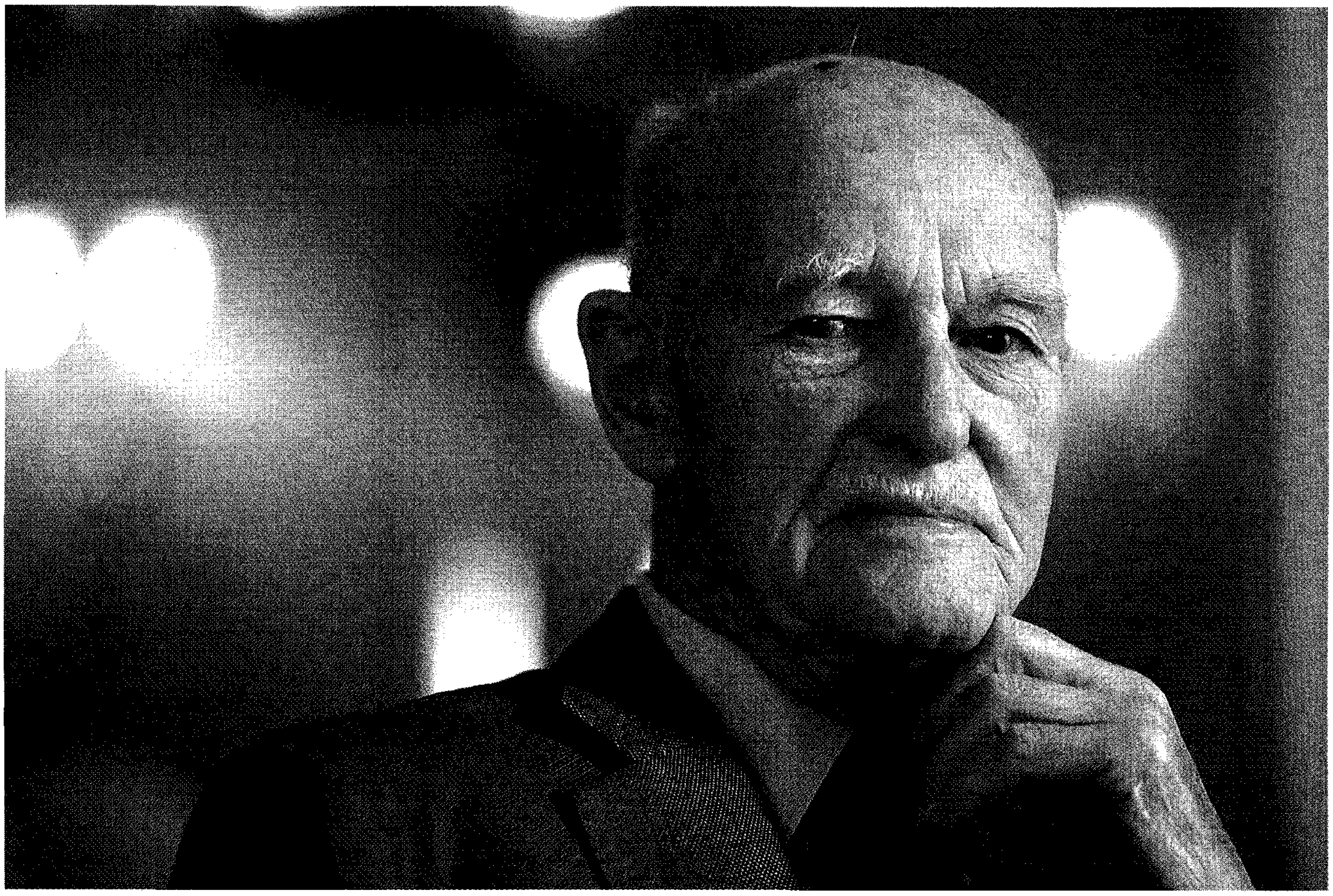
Others think as George Kennan does but don't dare to say so.

BY NICHOLAS LEMANN

Last month, George F. Kennan, the diplomat-historian, brought out his eighteenth book, a work of genealogy called "An American Family: The Kennans: The First Three Generations." It is the slenderest piece of writing he has ever put between hard covers—the slightness of it being a sign less of his age (ninety-six) than of the amount of material that was available to him. The book is a rewrite of a privately printed family history that Kennan produced some years ago, which was itself based on a genealogy his grandfather had put together much earlier, and it teases out a highly suppositional story from a few, almost archeological shards of detail. The appeal of "An American Family" lies less in the story than in the gorgeous, premodern style in which Kennan tells it, and in the opportunity it offers to see the author, in his efforts to attach a meaning to his ancestors' lives, reveal something about himself.

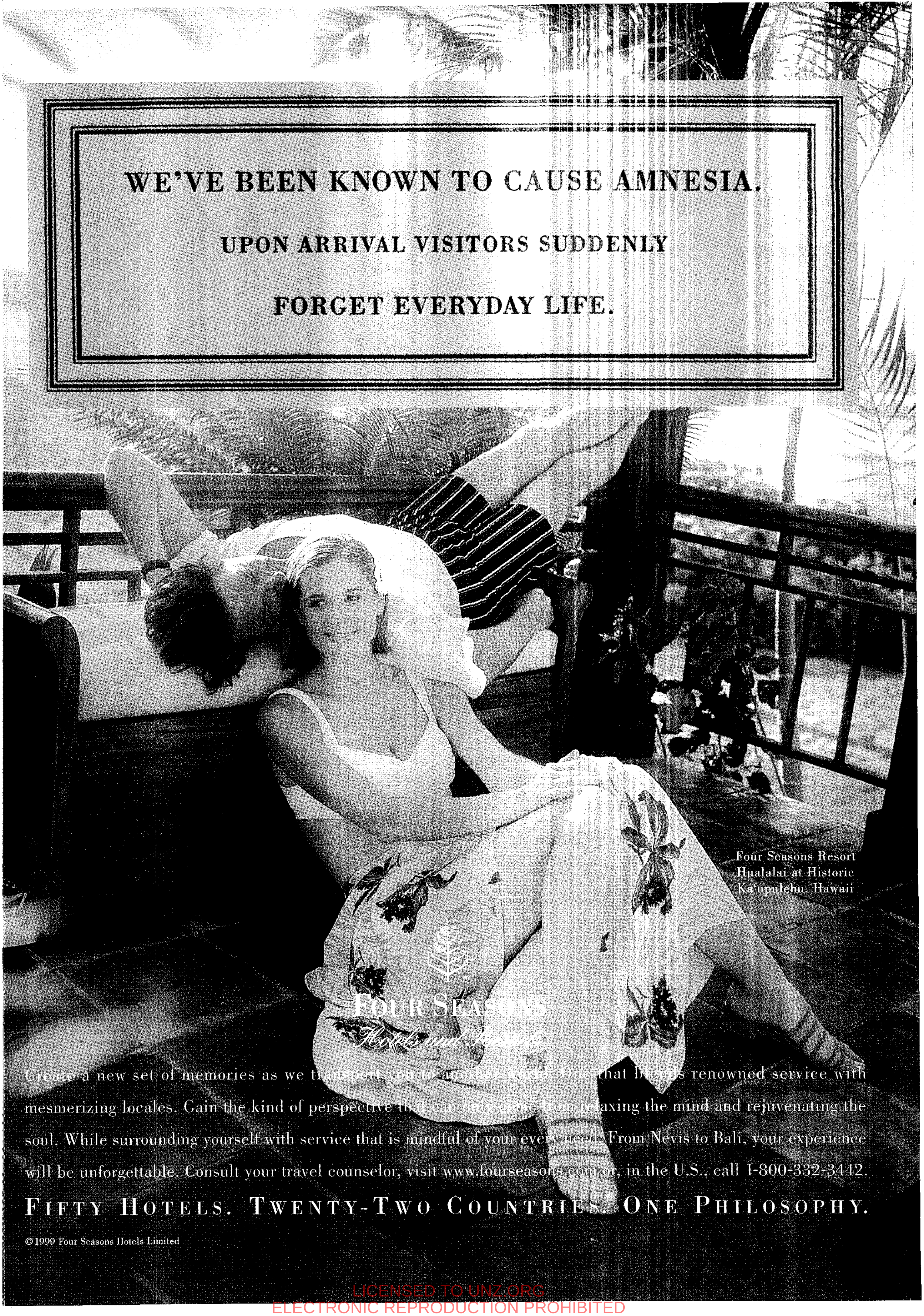
Kennan is a compelling figure, partly because he has had a remarkable life, partly because he is still here to talk about it, and partly because he has things to say—bleak and forceful things—about the present as well as the past. Born into the middle class in Milwaukee in 1904, he fell as a teen-ager under the spell of F. Scott Fitzgerald's "This Side of Paradise" and decided to follow Fitzgerald's path from the Midwest to Princeton and the great world. He joined the newborn United States Foreign Service, and in 1928 he chose the route of a well-known cousin of his grandfather's, also named George Kennan, and became an expert on Russia. The apogee of his fame came in the late nineteen-forties, when Kennan, the top career diplomat in the American Embassy in Moscow, got fed up with the casual, chummy attitude toward the Soviet Union which the Secretary of State, James F. Byrnes, had displayed on an official visit, and wrote a dispatch, retrospectively known as the Long Telegram, warning of the dangers of trusting the Stalin regime. A year later, Kennan wrote an article for *Foreign Affairs*, under the pseudonym X (although everybody in the diplomatic world knew he had written it), called "The Sources of Soviet Conduct"—another dire warning, and the first occurrence of the word "containment" in print as a recommended American policy toward the Soviet Union after the Second World War.

Since then, Kennan has been identified with the Cold War. He must be the only still vigorous man who observed the Soviet show trials of the thirties, gave a public speech on V-E Day in Moscow, and worked with Roosevelt and Truman and Stalin and Acheson and Marshall. It is incorrect, however, to think of him as a



ERIK FREELAND/MATRIX

"I think the country is coming apart," Kennan, now ninety-six years old, said. "I have a great distrust of the monster nations."



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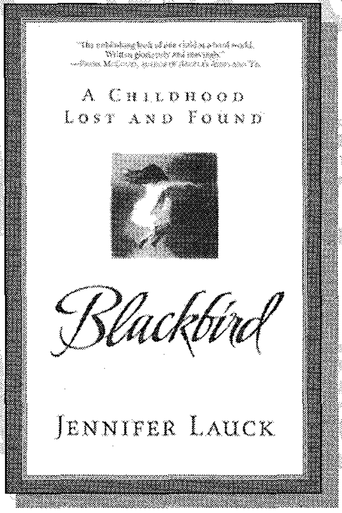
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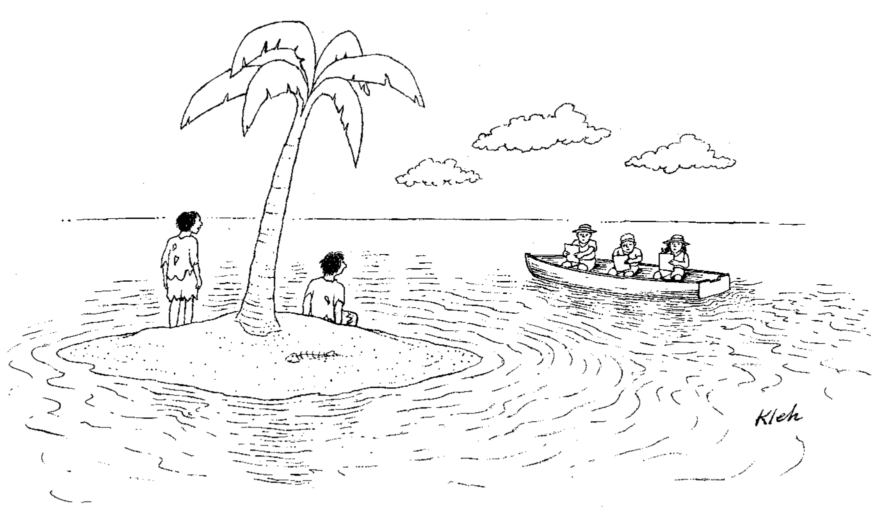
"Ignore them. They're cartoonists."

• •

Cold Warrior pure and simple, as—to use the description commonly applied to him—the Cold War's "architect." Except for brief spells as head of the Policy Planning Staff in the State Department in the forties, Ambassador to the Soviet Union in the fifties, and Ambassador to Yugoslavia in the sixties, Kennan has spent the last half century living in Princeton, as a faculty member of the Institute for Advanced Study, and writing.

People who, because of the X article, have assumed him to be a conventional hawk have found themselves continually surprised by other positions he has taken over the years, such as his opposition to the formation of NATO, to the Vietnam War, to the nuclear-arms race, and to the Reagan defense buildup. So have people who thought he might be moving to the left and then saw him express doubts about the wisdom of political independence for former colonial states, particularly in Africa; about American intervention on humanitarian grounds in Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo; and about American advocacy of human rights in other countries. A more perceptive way of understanding Kennan is as a pessimist who believes that almost no ambitious human endeavor can work and that we'd be better off not trying to solve the world's problems if they don't pose a direct threat to us. Kennan is actually much less a figure out of the past who is miraculously still with us, and much more a provocateur, who stands in firm opposition to the expansive optimism of American society at this moment.

"An American Family" is a typical Kennan production, in that it uses a confectionary literary style, full of digressions, to establish a position of reverence for the plain, severe virtues. Kennan detects in his forebears (a succession of modest frontier farmers and rural ministers) a "persistent, and apparently compulsive, striving for maximum independence in both their personal and social lives." They held themselves apart, at some cost, from "the mainstream of American life," because it "resented and resisted all deviations, or even attempted deviations, from its uniformities," and represented "a civilization of the least common denominator." These conclusions are based on so little evidence—there is not a single surviving word written in the hand of one of the early Kennans—that it hardly qualifies as a foray into armchair psychology to say that Kennan is talking about himself here: the man set stubbornly apart from the general run of humanity.

Kennan agreed to spend some time talking with me about the book, and about how the world looks to him now. One morning in September, I presented myself at his spacious, orderly house in Princeton, where he lives with his wife of almost seventy years, Annelise. Kennan was sitting in a chair in a front room, looking a little like Marlon Brando in his last scene in "The Godfather": plaid flannel shirt, green khakis, pencil-thin white mustache, white hair grown a bit long. He stood up to greet me, using two canes; he was tall, thin, and erect, with clear blue eyes. He led me into the living room, where there were a few plain pieces of furniture, some bookshelves, some prints, a woven cotton rug, and a vase of hydrangeas on a table—the feeling of the room was that of a perfect middle point having been found between academic-Spartan and bourgeois-luxurious.

"Years ago," he told me, after we sat down, "I got interested in Grandfather's book, because occasionally I had reason to travel up to Boston and to go through one of these towns where my family lived. And I thought I would pursue this independently, out of sheer curiosity. That caused me to become engaged with the subject and the people. Then, sixteen years ago, I had done a lot of work on this, quite a bit of work, and I thought that I was dying. I was then about eighty years old and had ailments. I thought that if I didn't write what I knew, it would be lost to the rest of the family. So I wrote a hasty little book and had it privately published. Then, some years later, I finished working on things I was interested in as a professor and a scholar, and I turned to this again and thought I could do much better, and write something more interesting."

Where, I asked, had his almost mannered style of writing come from? "I think much of it came from the old foreign service," Kennan said. "We were required to give a certain stately and dignified form to many of the things we wrote. Although this was never said by the ambassador overseeing the officer, the dispatches all had to begin with the salutation 'The Honorable the Secretary of State.' Then 'Sir.' And then the first sentence had to embody the phrase 'I have the honor.' So you had to say, 'In my dispatch of such and such I had the honor to mention to you So-and-So.' But you always had to put that into the first sentence. It was the way that George Washington and the other Founding Fathers wrote. And when you got to the end of one of these diplomatic dispatches you had to end, 'I have the honor to be, sir, your humble and obedient servant.' " Kennan laughed at the thought. "Well, there was something about the restrictions on the diplomatic writing which I think was good for me. It was a really good restraint, I thought, for young writers. Goethe said that literary mastery expresses itself only in the restrictions it accepts. I don't know if you speak German. '*In der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister*': 'In the lim-

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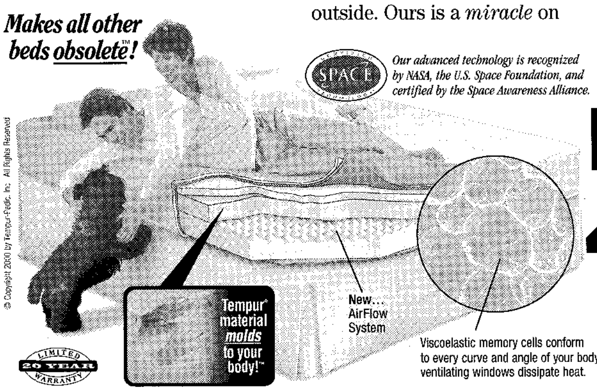
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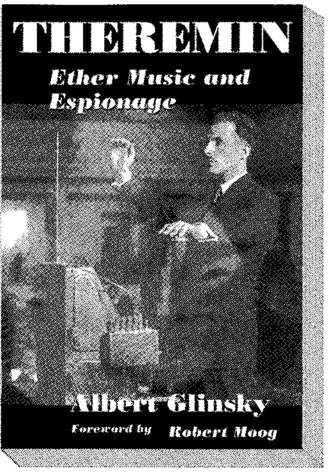

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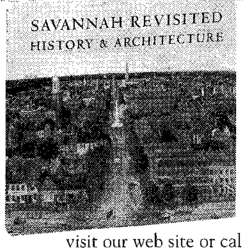

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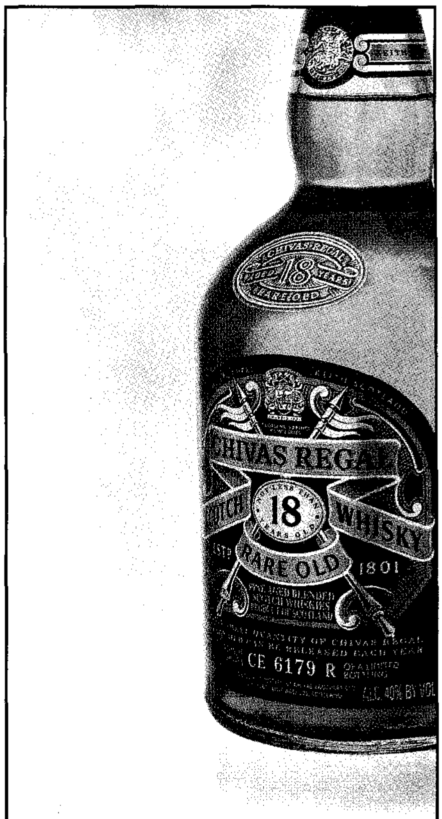

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itations the master shows his mastery.' "

In his famous post-Second World War warnings about the Soviets, Kennan insisted that they be understood primarily as eternal, mournful, suspicious Russians, not as Communists—a view that emerged from his immersion in Russian literature. You can see the stamp of Chekhov in diary entries he kept during his diplomatic travels (they were published in book form in 1989, under the title, "Sketches from a Life," and are now being reissued, to accompany "An American Family") and even in the way he perceived the Soviet leadership. Here, for example, is a description of Stalin from the first volume of his memoirs, published in 1967:

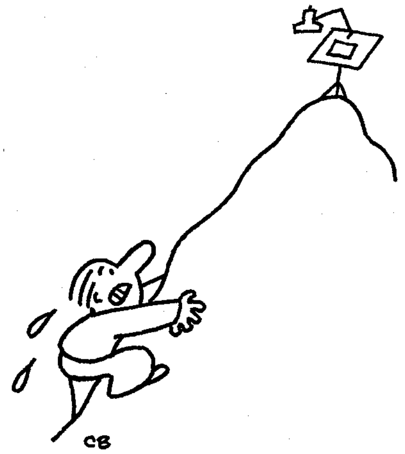
> His was a low-slung, smallish figure, neither markedly stout nor thin, inclining, if anything, to the latter. The square-cut tunic seemed always a bit too large for him; one sensed an effort to compensate for the slightness of stature. Yet there was also a composed, collected strength, and a certain rough handsomeness, in his features. The teeth were discolored, the mustache scrawny, coarse, and streaked. This, together with the pocked face and yellow eyes, gave him the aspect of an old battle-scarred tiger. In manner—with us, at least—he was simple, quiet, unassuming. There was no striving for effect. His words were few. They generally sounded reasonable and sensible; indeed they often were. An unforewarned visitor would never have guessed what depths of calculation, ambition, love of power, jealousy, cruelty, and sly vindictiveness lurked behind this unpretentious facade.

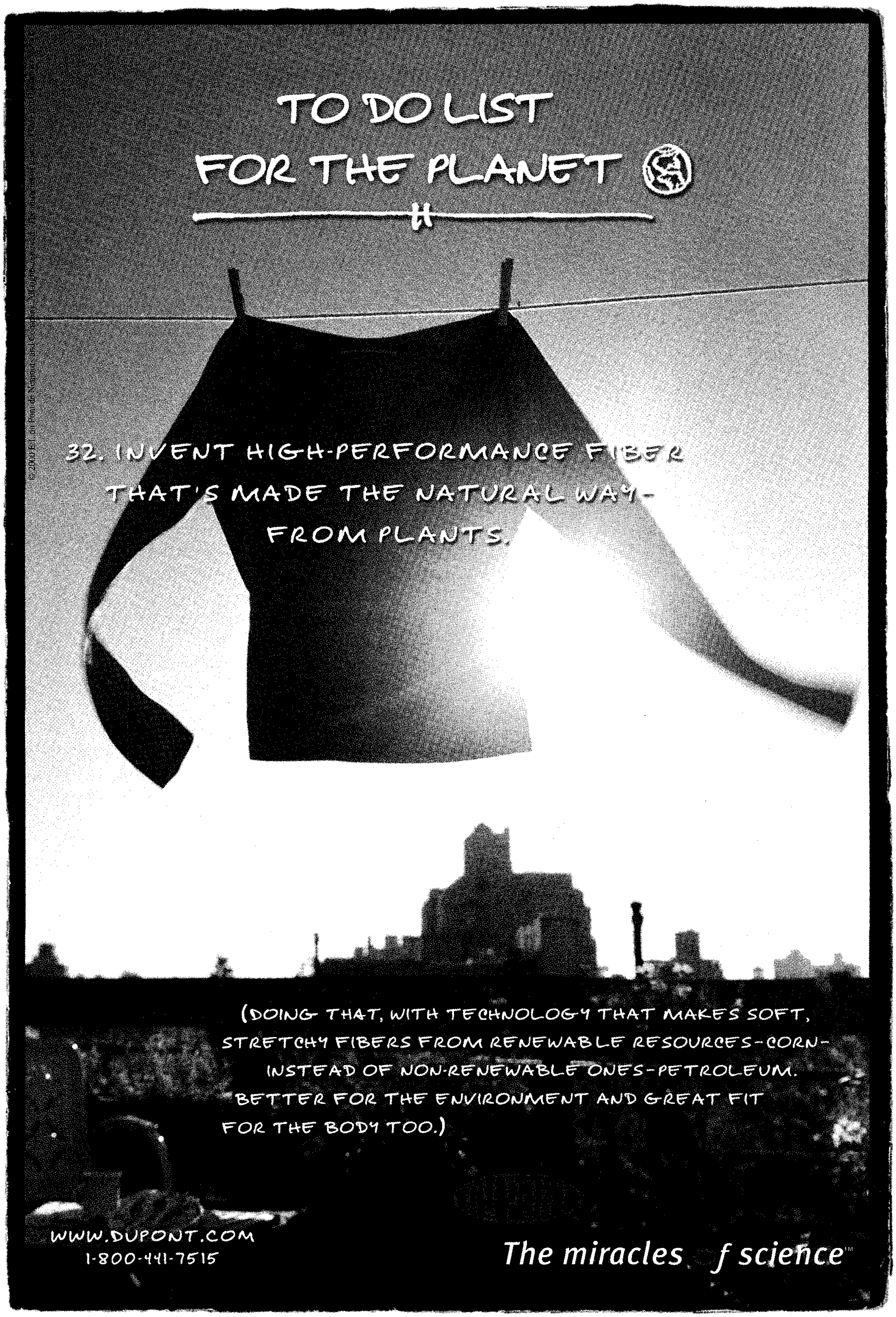
It was interesting, he said, that the Second World War, unlike the First, had produced so little distinguished literature. There was nobody of the calibre of Erich Maria Remarque, for example. I said I thought that in recent years the aspect of the Second World War which has shown itself to be most resonant for writers has been the Holocaust, not the combat itself.

"My own feeling," Kennan said, "is that it brought home to a great many of us that in a very large proportion of humanity, if some of the cultural restraints and civilizational customs are put to too great a test, there prove to be resources of unmitigated cruelty and evil in most human psyches. These things, fortunately, are held under control in most highly developed civilizational forms. The bestial potentialities of the human psyche are probably almost everywhere existent and have to be watched for. I am speaking here as a profound conservative. If you look at the eighteenth century of Europe, there were injustices galore, but there were limits."

When I asked what should be done when this bestiality emerges somewhere, as it often has in the years since the template of the Cold War was lifted from a hundred nationalities, Kennan said, "Well, unfortunately, I think there are limits to what we can do about it. I think it's dangerous to try to create great changes in human nature in any short space and time. If you're going to change a civilization, it can be done only as the gardener does it, not as the engineer does it. That is, it's got to be done in harmony with the rules of nature and can't all be done overnight. That's why I'm against practically all revolutions—because they usually end badly by trying to do too much at once." If George W. Bush were better at articulating his opposition to what he calls "nation-building," that is the sort of thing he would say.

I thought that Kennan's preference in the Presidential election, which he obviously was following quite avidly, might have been Bush, because of the Texas governor's mistrust of American endeavors abroad and of Washington endeavors at home. (The recent call by Bush's chief foreign-policy adviser, Condoleezza Rice, for the withdrawal of American troops from the Balkans was pure Kennan.) But his choice was Al Gore, he said, "simply because his opponent is not to me a very impressive person. He is a nice Texan, juvenile still, intellectually. Gore, I think, has far more of a grasp of national problems than does Bush. But the man I'd hoped most from was Bradley"—Bill Bradley, the former New Jersey senator. "I had ventured to hope that he could





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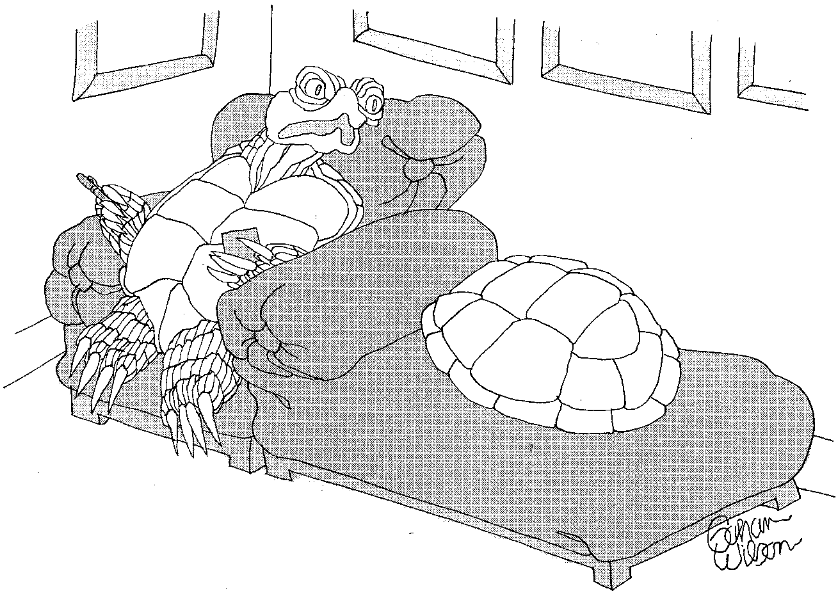


"This is getting us nowhere!"

• •

make himself the head of something resembling an independent political movement in the country, no longer dependent on the great moneyed interests. If we really could get campaign reform, then I could see chances of the growth of a new form of politics and government in this country. But, even then, I think the country is coming apart, partly because of its susceptibility to immigration"—something that Kennan believes is a grave, pressing threat to the internal stability of the United States.

If Kennan were to construct an alternate creed to geopolitical idealism, built on the lessons about modesty, decency, and independence which he drew from his family's history, what would it be? "Well, in the first place," he said, "I have a great lack of confidence, in fact a great distrust, of the monster nations, where there is the exertion of political authority over millions and millions of people from some given center. That applies to all the monster nations of today: to ourselves, to the Russians, to the Chinese, to the Indians, and it may come to apply to Brazil. I think they are dangerous to themselves, as well as to everybody else. I think they attribute to their centralized governments virtues and powers that are beyond the normal human. You lose all real, intimate connection between the source of national power and the people themselves. For this reason, I feel that our own country has to be decentralized"—a reference to an eccentric proposal he made in his book "Around the Cragged Hill," published in 1993, that the United States be divided into "something like a dozen constituent republics."

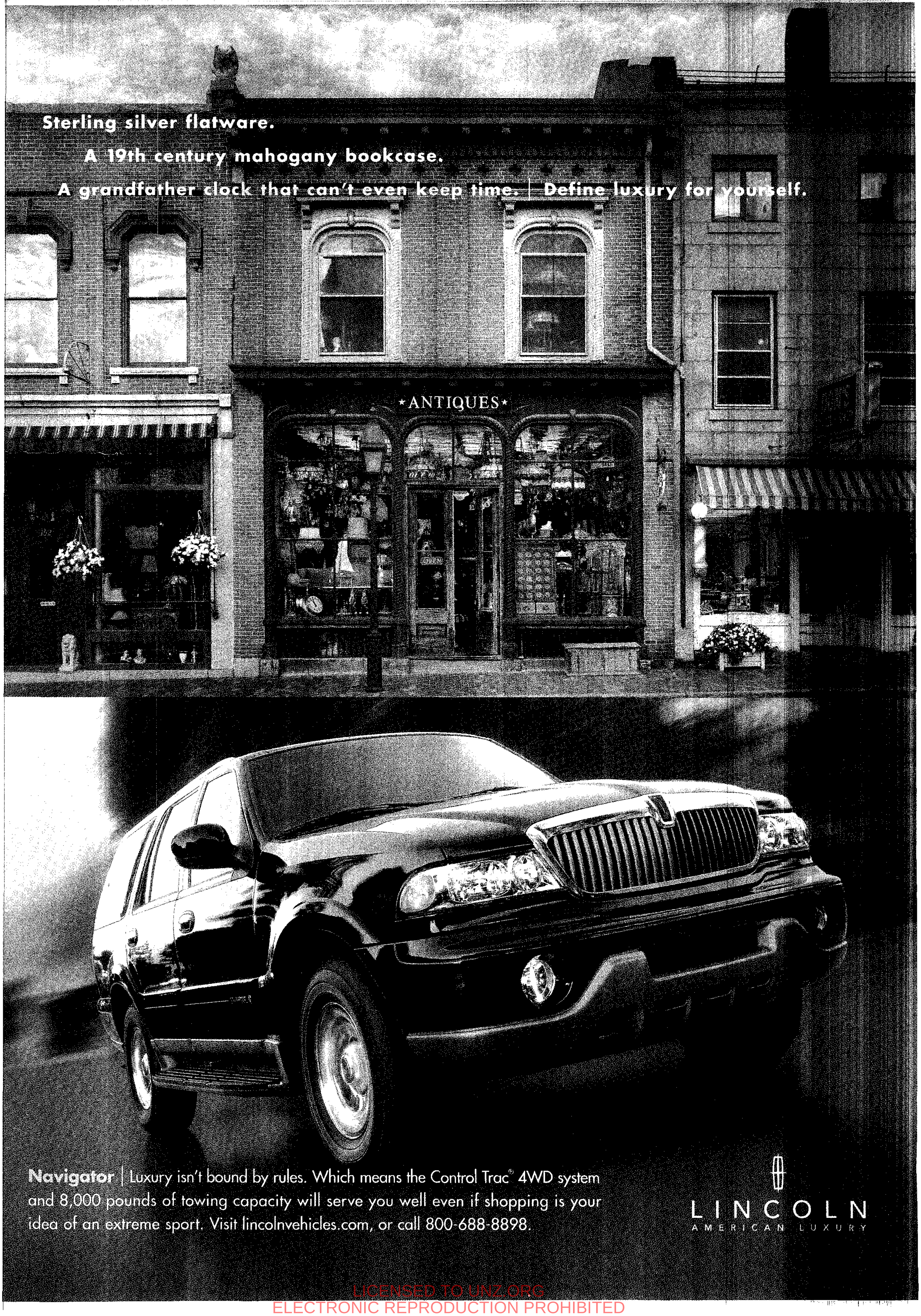
I noticed that as Kennan's comments became ever gloomier he seemed to brighten. By the time we were into the second hour of our talk, he was almost giddily cheerful. His view of life is not, in other words, an artifact either of old age or of a blue cloud that has temporarily settled around him. It may be constitutional (his mother died when he was two months old, which left him, he has written, "scarred for life"), and it may be a matter of long-standing intellectual conviction (in 1938, he wrote out by hand a manifesto, unearthed by Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas in "The Wise Men," calling for "the very extensive restriction of suffrage in national affairs," particularly for women, blacks, and immigrants), but his woeful way of thinking is certainly not something he has come to only recently.

Inside the foreign-policy world, Kennan is revered as a giant, but more for his literary sensibility than for his effect upon policy. He has never played the inside game adeptly; at every turn, he chose to express his position clearly and dramatically, often at the expense of maximum influence—not a typical strategy for the wise-man type. But his life of endless bureaucratic defeats and unheeded warnings has been victorious. What others at his level thought and did—people like Charles Bohlen and John McCloy—is fading. What Kennan did remains vivid, because he put it in writing.

If it is wrong to think of Kennan as the consummate diplomatic establishmentarian, it is also wrong to think of him as a solitary figure. Other people think the same things he does, but don't express them so directly. Just as containment was an aborning American policy for which Kennan provided a name and a rationale, his present pessimism is the expression of a widely held position not particular to him. He has a genius for importing a tragic consciousness from its natural home in literature into the usually hopeful realm of public affairs; and as the new century brings with it ferocious arguments over just how much the United States can accomplish outside its own borders—morally, economically, and politically—those who want this country to do less will turn to Kennan. In fifty years, I would guess, he will be better known as the father of "tragic realism" than as the father of containment.

Kennan told me that he wants to write two more books. The first one, which is intended for publication, is a criticism of "the American idealization of our democracy as a model for all the rest of mankind," a tendency he said he considers to be "wholly unrealistic, vainglorious, and silly"; the other, to be privately printed, will explore his views on religion. Kennan said that he has been studying the life of Jesus. "I am interested in all this, in the final years of my life," he added.

I asked him why he now finds himself so strongly drawn to Christianity. "Because it recognizes in the human condition the same element of tragedy that I recognize myself," he said. "I would, in some ways, be a very poor Christian, because I think even modern man is a faulty entity. He has a great deal of the animal in him. His sexual appetites. His love of power. These are qualities of immense power, and less than admirable. I think God should recognize that he is not going to make perfection of many humans. Damn few: the saints. The rest are caught between innate good qualities and wholly uncontrollable—animalistic, if you will—instinctive compulsions that come to bear. That is part of the human condition, as I see it." ♦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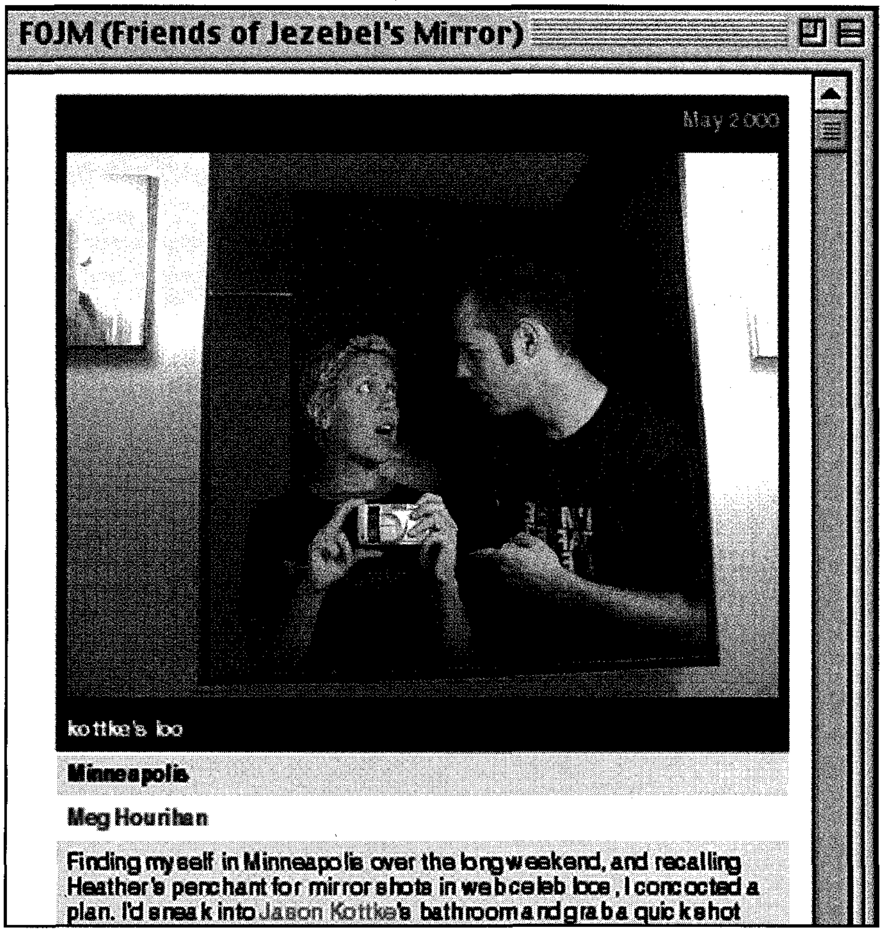
DIGITAL CULTURE

YOU'VE GOT BLOG

How to put your business, your boyfriend, and your life on-line.

BY REBECCA MEAD

Meg Hourihan was in a bad mood. She had nothing major to worry about, but she was afflicted by the triple malaise of a woman in her late twenties: (a) the weather was lousy; (b) she was working too hard; and (c) she didn't have a boyfriend. Nothing, not even eating, seemed very interesting to her. The only thing that did sound appealing was moving to France and finding a hot new French boyfriend, but even when she talked about that idea she struck a sardonic, yeah-right-like-I'm-really-going-to-do-*that* kind of tone.



Minneapolis

Meg Hourihan

Finding myself in Minneapolis over the long weekend, and recalling Heather's penchant for mirror shots in webceleb loos, I concocted a plan. I'd sneak into Jason Kottke's bathroom and grab a quick shot

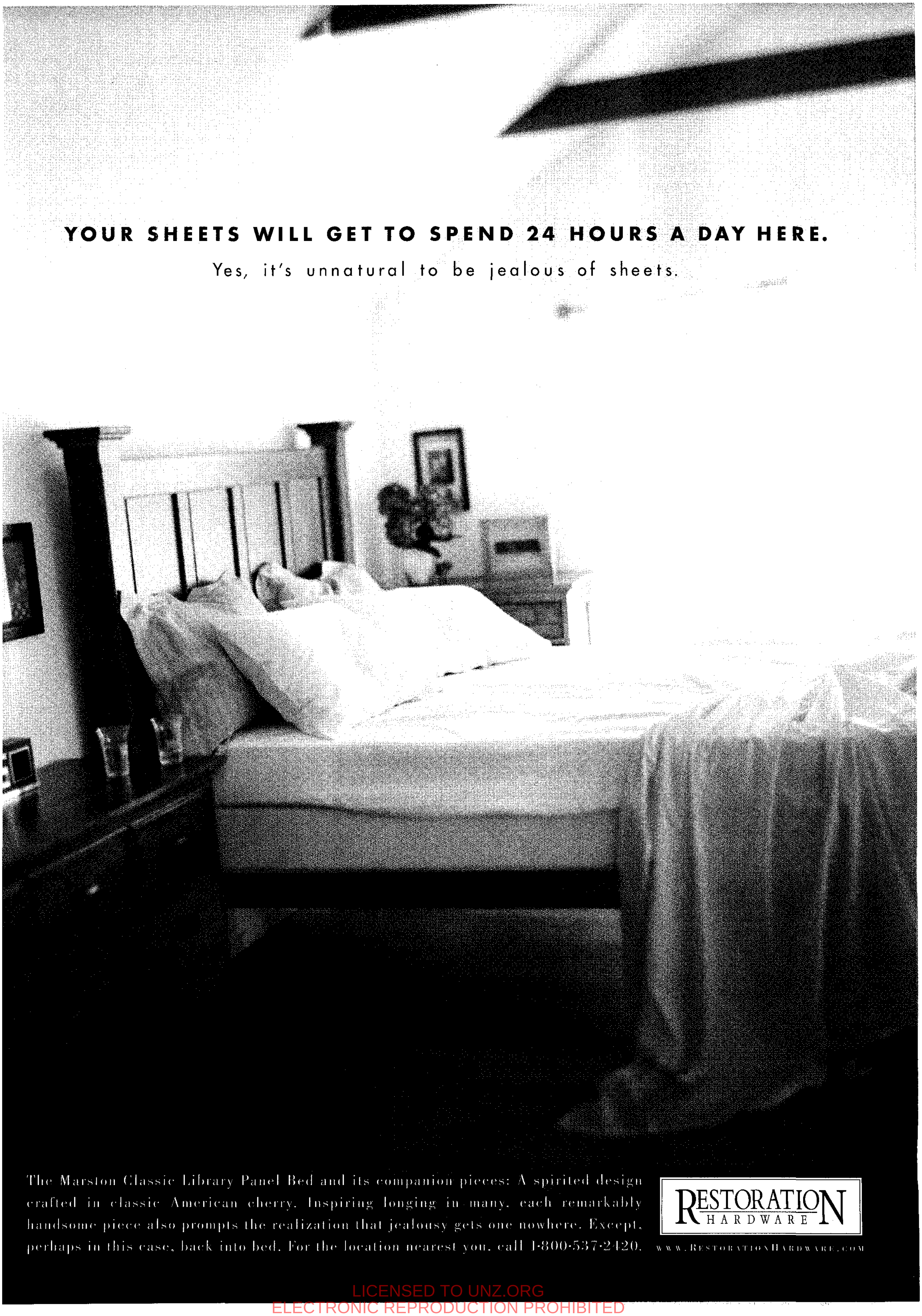
Monkeyboy posted a link to a photo of Meg and Jason: "So what's up with this?"

I know this about Meg because I read it a few months ago on her personal Web site, which is called Megnut.com. I've been reading Megnut for a while now, and so I know all kinds of things about its author, like how much she loved Hilary Swank in "Boys Don't Cry," and how she wishes there were good fish tacos to be had in San Francisco, where she lives. I know she's a feminist, and that she writes short stories, and that she's close to her mom. I know that she's a little dreamy and idealistic; that she fervently believes there is a distinction between "dot-com people," who are involved in the Internet for its I.P.O. opportunities, and "Web people," who are in love with the imaginative possibilities presented by the medium, and that she counts herself among the latter.

Meg is one of the founders of a company called Pyra, which produces an Internet application known as Blogger. Blogger, which can be used free on the Internet, is a tool for creating a new kind of Web site that is known as a "weblog," or "blog," of which Megnut is an example. A blog consists primarily of links to other Web sites and commentary about those links. Having a blog is rather like publishing your own, on-line version of *Reader's Digest*, with daily updates: you troll the Internet, and, when you find an article or a Web site that grabs you, you link to it—or, in weblog parlance, you "blog" it. Then other people who have blogs—they are known as bloggers—read your blog, and if they like it they blog your blog on their own blog.

Blogs often consist of links to articles that readers might otherwise have missed, and thus make for informative reading: it was via an excellent blog called Rebecca's Pocket that I learned, for instance, that the Bangkok transit authority had introduced a ladies-only bus to protect female passengers from straphanging molestation. It also led me to a site devoted to burritos, where I underwent an on-line burrito analysis, in which my personality type was diagnosed according to my favorite burrito elements: "Your pairing of a meat-free burrito and *all* those fatty toppings indicates a dangerous ability to live with illusions." Blogs often include links to sites that illuminate the matter at hand. For example, when Meg wrote about planting a plumeria cutting, she linked to a site called the Plumeria Place, which included a picture and a description of the plant.

Many bloggers have Internet-related jobs, and so they use their sites to keep other bloggers informed of the latest news in the world of Web design or copyright law. Jason Kottke, a Web designer from Minneapolis who maintains a site called Kottke.org, is widely admired among bloggers as a thoughtful critic of Web culture. (On the strength of the picture transmitted by his Web-cam, he is also widely perceived as very cute. If you read around among blogs, you find that Kottke is virtually beset by blogging groupies.) Getting blogged by Kottke, or by Meg Hourihan or one of her colleagues at Pyra, is the blog equivalent of having your book featured on "Oprah": it generally means a substantial



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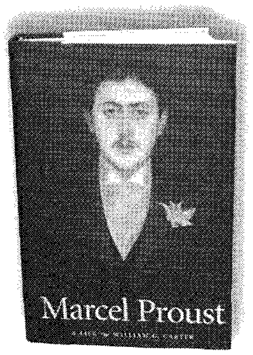

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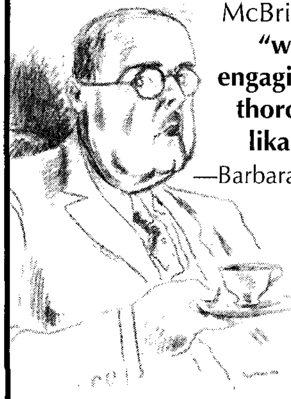

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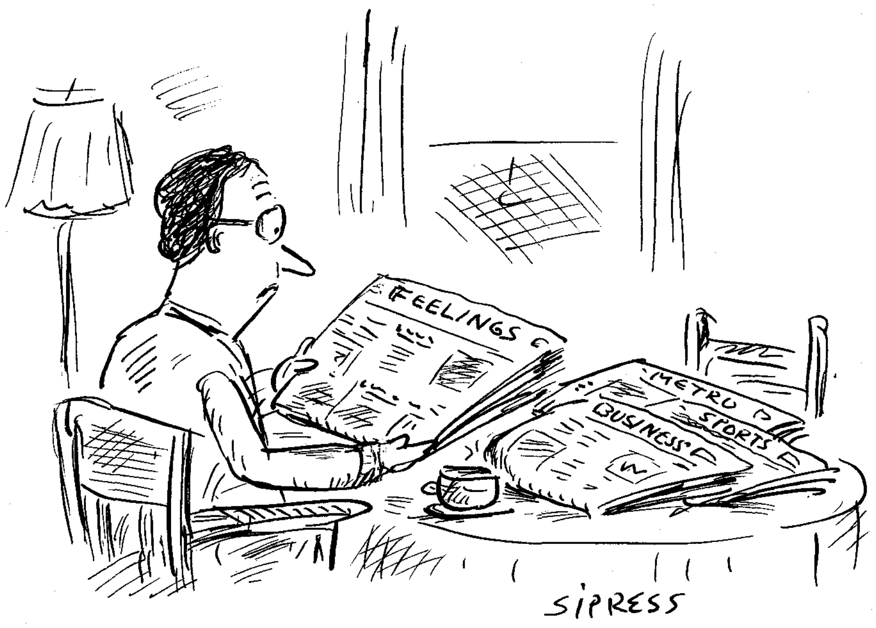
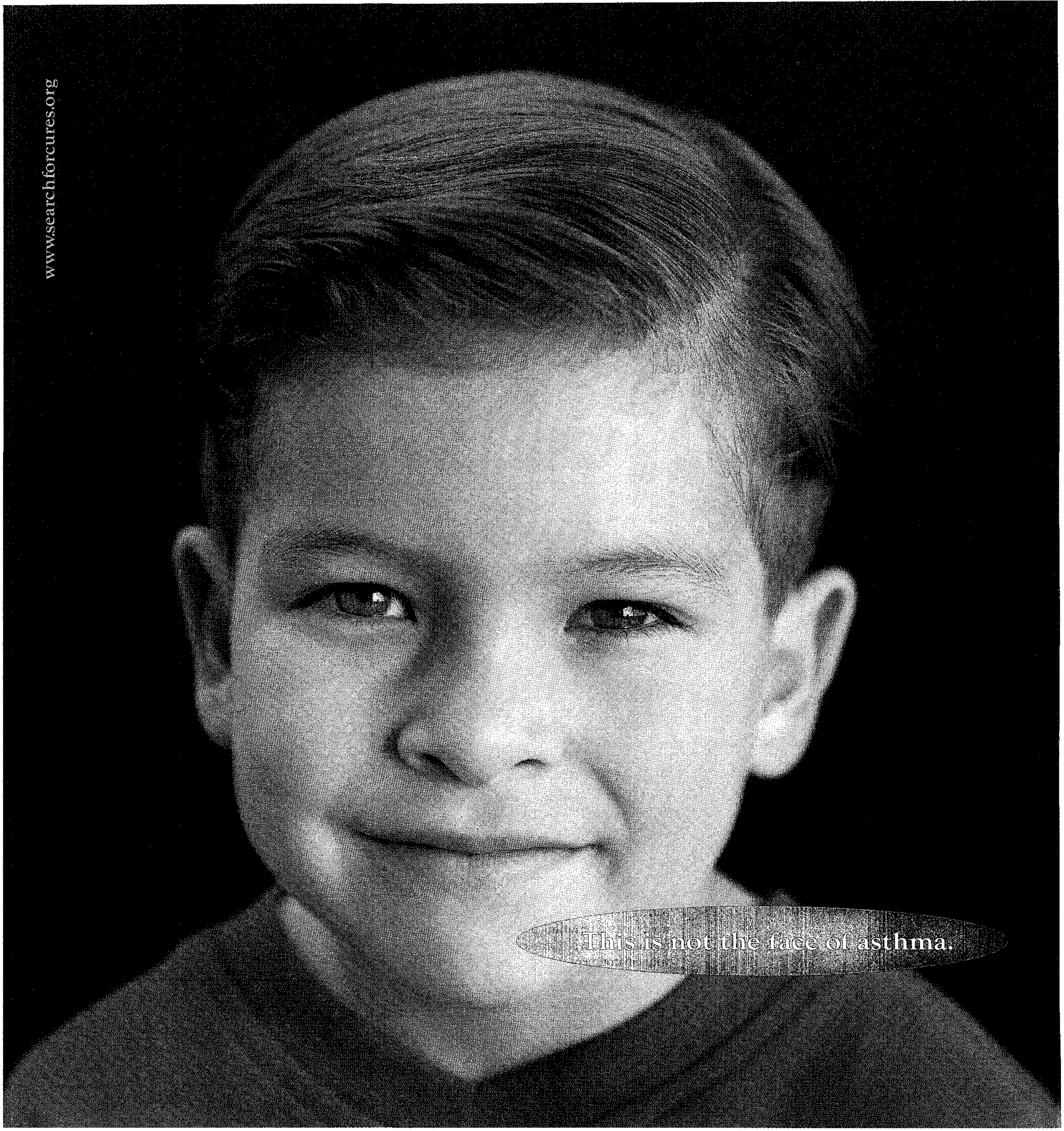
boost in traffic—enough, perhaps, to earn the blog a mention on Beebo.org, which has functioned as a blog best-seller list. (An example from a blog called Fairvue.com: "Jason K. linked to Fairvue. My life is now complete.")

The weblog format of links and commentary has been around for some years, but in the early days of weblogging the sites had to be built by hand, one block of code at a time, which meant that they were produced only by a handful of technology mavens. There were a few weblogs that earned a following among non-tech civilians—Jim Romenesko's Medianews, a weblog of stories about the media business, is one; Arts & Letters Daily, a digest of intellectual affairs, is another—but most remained more specialized. A year and a half ago, there were only fifty or so weblogs; now the number has increased to thousands, with blogs like Megnut getting around a thousand visits a day. This growth is due in large part to Blogger, and a couple of other weblogging tools such as Pitas and EditThisPage, which have made launching a personal Web site far simpler.

Most of the new blogs are, like Megnut, intimate narratives rather than digests of links and commentary; to read them is to enter a world in which the personal lives of participants have become part of the public domain. Because the main audience for blogs is other bloggers—blogging etiquette requires that, if someone blogs your blog, you blog his blog back—reading blogs can feel a lot like listening in on a conversation among a group of friends who all know each other really well. Blogging, it turns out, is the CB radio of the Dave Eggers generation. And that is how, when Meg Hourihan followed up her French-boyfriend-depression posting with a stream-of-consciousness blog entry a few weeks later saying that she had developed a crush on someone but was afraid to act on it—"Maybe I've become very good at eluding love but that's not a complaint I just want to get it all out of my head and put it somewhere else," she wrote—her love life became not just her business but the business of bloggers everywhere.

Pyra, the company that produces Blogger, has its offices on the ground floor of a warehouse building on Townsend Street in SoMa, the former industrial district that is now home to many of San Francisco's Internet businesses. The company, which was founded last year by Evan Williams (who has his own blog, Evhead.com) in collaboration with Meg Hourihan, occupies two computer-filled rooms that face each other across an atrium littered with random pieces of office furniture discarded by Internet startups whose fortunes took a dive when the Nasdaq did, last April. Pyra survived the dive, with some help from venture capitalists, and from Mr. and Mrs. Hourihan, Meg's parents. (More recently, Advance Publications, which publishes this magazine, invested in Pyra.) Still, Ev and Meg ruefully talk about how they

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America's Pharmaceutical Companies

Leading the way in the search for cures

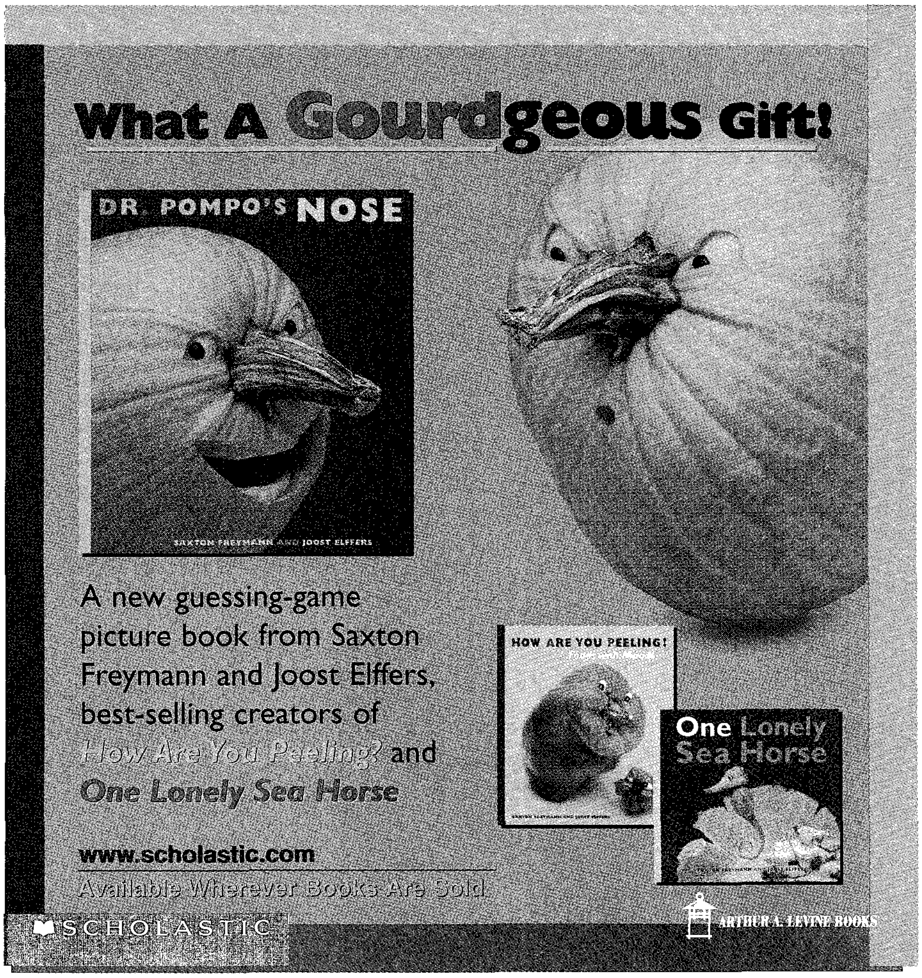
managed to get through the summer of 1999, the season of implausible I.P.O.s, without becoming rich.

"We first met at a party," Meg explained, as she and I sat on a battered couch. Ev rolled his desk chair over to join us. Meg, who grew up in Boston and graduated from Tufts with a degree in English, is voluble and given to gesticulation. She is tall and athletic-looking, and has cropped spiky hair that last spring she bleached white-blond after polling the readers of her blog about her hairstyling options. Meg and Ev dated for a while before deciding that their shared passion for the Internet did not translate into a shared passion for each other; but then Ev drafted Meg to help him start Pyra, the goal of which was to develop a Web-based tool that would help project managers share information with co-workers. (They have since been joined by four other friends.)

"I knew she was very good at helping me think about ideas," Ev said. Ev comes from Nebraska—he once blogged an aerial photograph of the family farm—and is taciturn and ironic; he has a beetling brow and a Tintin coif. In 1991, he dropped out of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln after a year and launched his first Internet company, for which he still owes his parents money.

Blogger wasn't part of Pyra's original plan; Ev and a colleague, Paul Bausch, built it for fun, and then launched it on the Web one week in the summer of 1999, when Meg was on vacation. That fall, Blogger found plenty of users among geeks who were glad to have a tool that made weblogging easier; only recently, though, did Ev and Meg set aside their other Pyra plans. "It took us a long time to realize what we had with Blogger," Meg said.

That afternoon, Meg sat down with me at her computer—I tried to stay out of the range of the Webcam that is trained on her whenever she sits at her desk—and showed me how Blogger works. To use Blogger, it helps to know a little of the computer language html, but, once you've set up your site, adding new chunks of text is as easy as sending an E-mail. Meg clicked open the Blogger inputting box, typed a few words, and showed me how she could hit one button and send the text to her site. The creators of Blogger think it may make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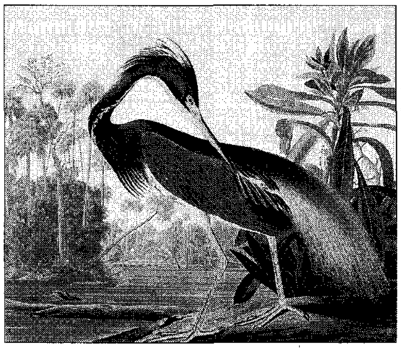

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posting items on the Web a little too easy; a new term, "blogorrhea," has been coined to describe the kind of entries—"I'm tired," or "This sucks"—that are the work of the unimaginative blogger.

While I was sitting at Meg's desk, I noticed the bookmarks that she had on her Web browser. Among them were Evhead and Kottke.org. She had also marked Jason Kottke's Webcam. Jason Kottke was the object of the crush that Meg had described in her blog a few months earlier. They met last March, at South by Southwest, an alternative-culture conference that takes place in Austin every spring.

"I recognized him immediately," Meg wrote in an E-mail to me. "He was taller than I thought he'd be, but I knew it was him." She had been reading his blog, Kottke.org, for ages. "I always thought he seemed cool and intelligent . . . but I thought he was a bit conceited. He was so well-known, and he wrote once about taking some on-line I.Q. tests and he actually posted his results, which I thought was showoffish."

After meeting Jason, Meg changed her mind: "He seemed not at all conceited like I thought, and actually pretty funny and nice, and cute, much cuter than he ever appeared on his Webcam."

Meg made sure she had an excuse to stay in touch—she offered to send Jason a customized version of Blogger code for him to try on Kottke.org. Once she got back to San Francisco, she said, "I wrote on Megnut that I had a crush, and he E-mailed me and said, 'Who's the crush on? Spill it, sister.' So I E-mailed him back and said it was him. He was really surprised." Meg took further electronic action to advance her aims, and altered her Web site so that it included her ICQ number—the number someone would need to send her an instant message, even though the last thing she wanted was to be inundated with instant messages from strangers. A couple of days later, Jason ICQ'd her for the first time. ("He fell for my trick," she said.) That night, they instant-messaged for three hours. A week later, she shifted technologies again, and called him on the telephone. Then she invited him to San Francisco, and that was that.

Meg and Jason had been dating for two months when I visited San Francisco, and he was due to arrive from Minneap-

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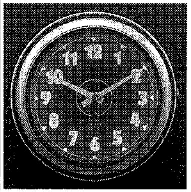
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olis for the weekend. Meg told me about a Web device she uses called Flight Tracker: you type in a flight number, and a map is displayed, with an icon representing the location of the airplane. "I always look at it, and think, Oh, he's over Nebraska now," she said.

I already knew that Meg and Jason were involved, because I'd been reading their Web sites; although neither of them had written anything about the relationship, there were hints throughout their recent entries. Those hints had also been under discussion on a Web site called Metafilter. Metafilter is a "community weblog," which means that anyone who is a member can post a link to it. Most of the posts to Metafilter are links to news stories or weird Web sites, but in early June someone named Monkeyboy had linked to a photograph of Meg and Jason looking into Jason's bathroom mirror. The picture was posted on a Web site belonging to a friend of Meg's who collects photographs of the mirrors of Web celebrities. Monkeyboy also linked to Megnut's "crush" entry, and to an entry that Jason had written on Kottke.org about Meg's site design, and he posted them all on Metafilter with the words "So what's up with this? I think there's something going on here." This generated a lively discussion, with some bloggers furthering the gossip by linking to other blogs whose authors had confessed to having crushes on Jason, while others wrote in suggesting it was none of anyone's business.

When I looked back at Jason's blog for the period just after he met Meg, I found no references to a romance. Jason's style is a little more sober. But there was one entry in which he seemed to be examining the boundary between his Web life and his non-Web life. He'd written that there were things going on in his life that were more personal than the stuff he usually wrote about in his weblog. "Why don't I just write it down somewhere private . . . a Word doc on my computer or in a paper diary?" he asked himself, and his readers. "Somehow, that seems strange to me though. . . . The Web is the place for you to express your thoughts and feelings and such. To put those things elsewhere seems absurd."

One day, I met Meg and Jason for breakfast. Jason, who is twenty-seven, is tall, with short hair and sideburns; he was wearing jeans and a Princess Mononoke T-shirt. She ordered a tofu scramble and soy latte, he had real eggs. I asked what it was like to have their private lives discussed among the members of their virtual community, and they said they thought it was funny. I asked whether they ever included hidden messages to each other in their blogs, an idea that seemed to surprise them. "Well, I did once use that word 'tingly,' " Meg said. Jason blushed.

A few days later, they stoked the gossip further by posting identical entries on their Web sites: word-for-word accounts of seeing a young girl on a bicycle in the street, and descriptions of the childhood memories that it triggered. Then a strange thing happened. One by one, several bloggers copied the little-girl entry into their blogs, as if they had seen the child on the bicycle, too. Other bloggers started to write parodies of the little-girl entry. Still other bloggers started to post messages to Metafilter, asking what the hell was going on with all these sightings of little girls. When I sent Meg an E-mail about this outbreak, she wrote back, "I was especially struck by the number of people who thought it was a big prank pulled by the 'popular' kids to make fun of the uncool kids."

There have been some ostentatious retreats from the blogging frenzy: last June, one well-known blogger named Derek Powazek announced in his blog that he wanted no part of it anymore, and that instead of addressing himself to the blogger community at large he would henceforth be writing with only a few friends and family members in mind. This announcement provoked a flurry of postings from neophyte bloggers, who feared they were facing the Twilight of Blogging before they had really had a chance to enjoy the Dawn of Blogging.

The people at Pyra, having generated a blog explosion with their Blogger software, aren't entirely happy about the way blogs have developed. "It's like being frustrated with your kid, when you know he could be doing so much more," Ev told me. He and Meg have been developing different uses for Blogger, including ones from which they might actually make some money. One idea is to install Blogger on the intranets of companies, so that it can be used as a means of letting large groups share information. (Cisco is currently experimenting with using Blogger in-house to keep minutes of project meetings up to date.)

Meanwhile, Meg and Ev have developed a whole new level of celebrity status. Not long ago, a group of bloggers created a community blog called the Pyra Shrine. There are posts about how hot Meg is ("Megnut is da bomb. She's one kewl lady") and whether Ev needs a personal assistant ("You know, to make him coffee and get him stuff. I'd do it. For free, even!"). The whole thing is very silly, and completely irresistible if you're a reader of Megnut or Evhead, or, indeed, if you are the creator of Megnut or Evhead. Meg linked to it on her site recently, and wrote, "O.K., I have to admit, this The Pyra Shrine cracks me up."

It was through the Pyra Shrine that I learned, one day last month, that Jason was moving to San Francisco. ("That's a big sacrifice. He must really love her," one of the Shrine contributors had posted.) I E-mailed Meg, who told me that Jason had taken a new Web-design job and was driving across the country—he was probably in Wyoming at that very moment. I remarked that since he was in a car she couldn't use Flight Tracker to see where he was.

"Oh yeah, it's so bad," she wrote back. "I'm so used to being able to communicate with him, or at least check in in some way all the time (Webcam, Flight Tracker, ICQ, E-mail, etc.) and now there's nothing. Well, except for phone at night, but still, seems like nothing compared with what I've gotten used to."

Later that night, I called Meg, and she sounded excited. "He should be here in three or four days," she said. Having mastered the techniques for having a digital relationship, she was finally ready for an analog one; and she hadn't even had to move to France to get it. ♦

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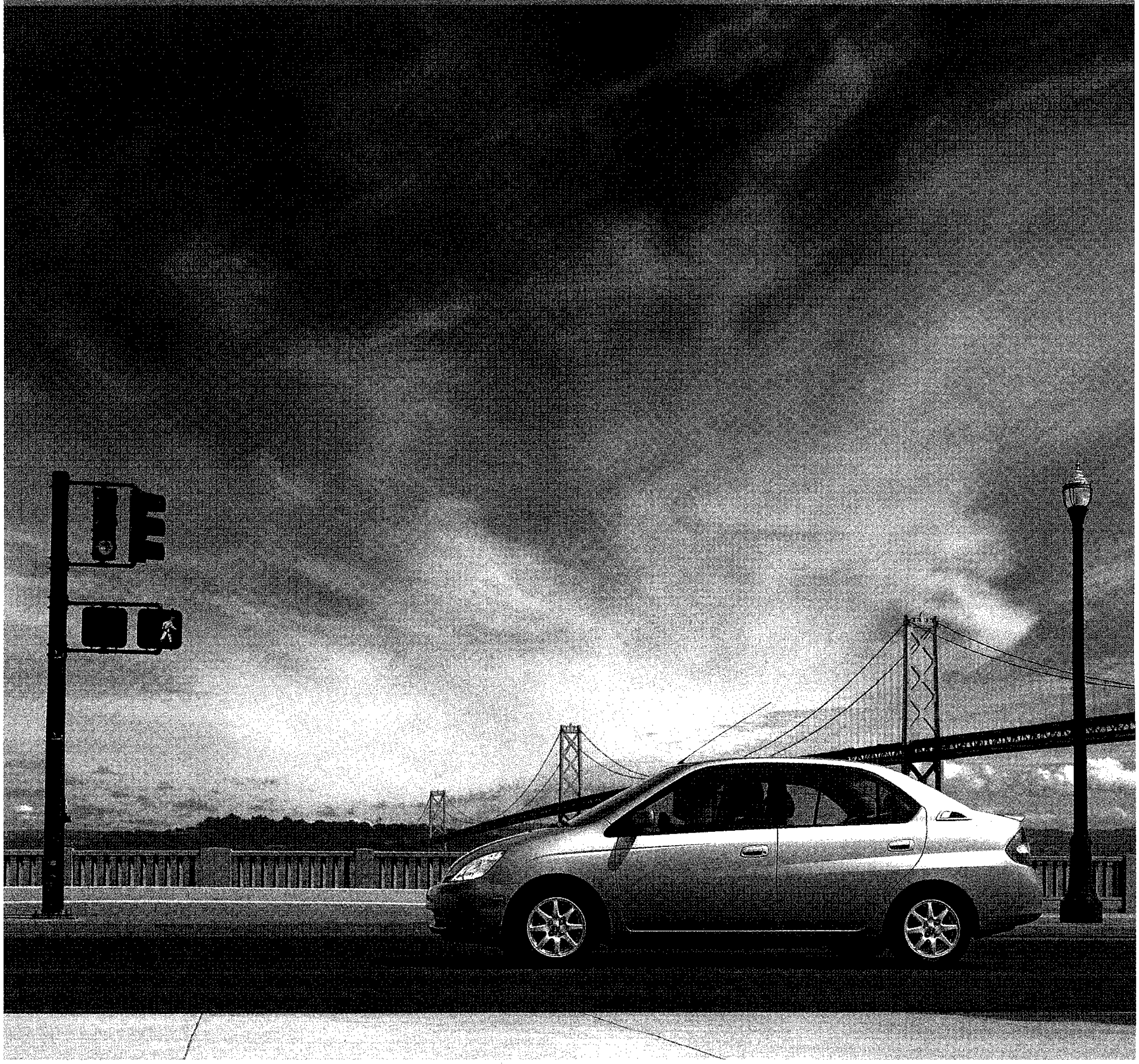

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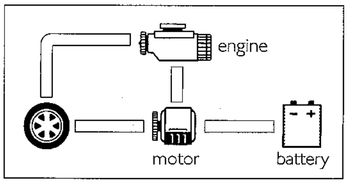

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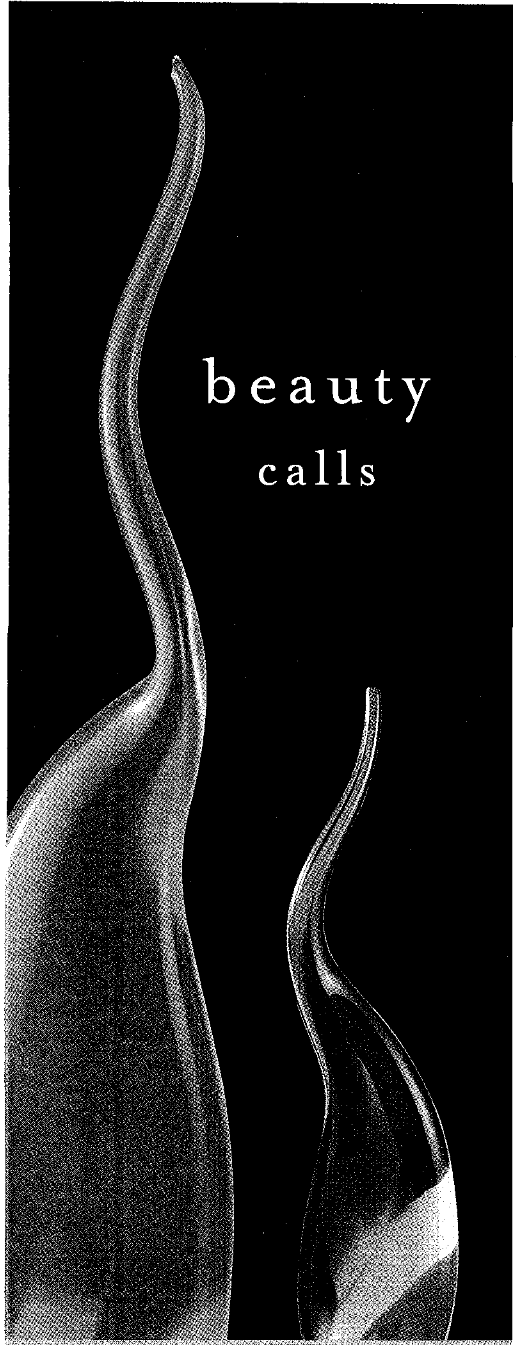

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LETTER FROM CHINA

HAMLET MEETS MAO

Bringing the bard to Sichuan.

BY PETER HESSLER

Lazy was one of my best students. He came from the same village as House and Yellow. On the first day of class, when they all took turns introducing themselves, Lazy stood up and announced, "My English name is Lazy. I am very lazy. I do not like to play basketball or football or do many things. My hobbies are sleeping."

My students were seniors in the English department at Fuling Teachers College, where I had been sent to teach English and American literature as a Peace Corps volunteer. Fuling was a Yangtze River town in Sichuan, a province in southwestern China, and there weren't any railroads or highways in that part of the country. Along with another volunteer, I had arrived on the slow boat from Chongqing. We were told that the last time Fuling had had American residents was before the Communist Liberation, in 1949.

Like Lazy, most of the students had come from peasant homes in the remote Sichuanese countryside. They were in their early twenties, and most of them had studied English for more than seven years. After graduation, nearly all of them planned to return to their home towns to teach English in middle schools. A generation earlier, the study of English had been seen as a political offense, but it was now part of the national curriculum for middle and high schools. In a small way, my students were a part of Deng Xiaoping's "Reform and Opening," the massive policy change that, beginning in 1978, had encouraged increased contact with the outside world and capitalist-style economic reforms (tactfully referred to as "socialism with Chinese characteristics").

In the beginning, I found their English names distracting. On the first day of class, one girl stood up and said that she had named herself Keller, in honor of Helen Keller. Some of the others had also taken their names from people they admired, which explained why one was called Barbara (from Barbara Bush), one Armstrong (from Neil Armstrong), and another, a particularly idealistic student, Marx. Other students, like House, Yellow, and North, had translated their Chinese names directly into English. Some of the names, like Silence Hill, seemed to come from nowhere at all. There was a Soddy, a Sanlee, and a Ker. A few of the names were unfortunate: Pen (a very small boy); Coconut (a very pretty girl). One boy called himself Daisy, a name that greatly dismayed the dean of the English department. The dean was a handsome man with sleek black hair, and his position and the weight of his responsibilities often gave him a mournful air. One day, he called me into his office to talk about Daisy.

"That's a girl's name, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes," I said. "Except now, in America, even girls don't like that name."

"I remember it from 'The Great Gatsby,' " the dean said, smiling sadly. As a student, his specialty had been American literature, and he was familiar with almost all of the great twentieth-century novelists. He sighed and shook his head.

"Last year that student had a boy's name," the dean said. "He changed it over the summer. I don't know why."

I didn't know why, either; I never talked with Daisy about it. He wasn't very approachable, and all I ever learned about him was that he had been crushed when the People's Liberation Army turned him down because of his bad eyesight. He was a tall, taciturn boy with an air of unfathomable sadness, and every day he wore a full camouflage uniform to class. Whether it was consolation or a form of self-punishment I never knew, and I didn't care. I simply liked having a tall camouflaged boy named Daisy sitting in the back of my class, and I would never have asked him to change either his name or his uniform. I didn't tell that to the dean, of course.

It was easy to poke fun at my students' names and smile at their childlike shyness, and there were moments when I was tempted to see them as simple young people from the countryside.

Students in the English classroom at Fuling Teachers College: They were incorrigible overactors. Photograph by Robert Meier.

But the Sichuanese countryside is not simple, and my students were learning subjects that had been unimaginable for rural Chinese in the past. Some of their grandmothers had had bound feet; few of their grandfathers had been able to read. Lazy was bright. Armstrong spoke English beautifully. Marx felt strongly about politics. One of the best writers in the class was Silence Hill, who had come from a particularly poor part of the countryside. Even though he was in his early twenties, he looked like a middle-aged peasant—short, stocky, his face tanned and weathered by the sun. He had a peasant's quiet smile and a peasant's modest politeness, and he had been a peasant until the day the government sent a letter informing him that his examination scores had won him admission to Fuling Teachers College.

My literature textbooks started with "Beowulf" and continued through twelve centuries and across the ocean to William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily." It was a lot of ground to cover, and I worried that I might be asking too much of my students. On the first day of class, I asked them to jot down the titles of any English-language books they had read, either in the original or in translation, and I asked them what they would like to study in my course:

> I've read Jack London and his "The Call of Wild," Dicken and his "The Tale of Two Cities," O. Henry and his "The Last Leaf," Shakespeare and his "King Lear" (and that made me burst into tears).
>
> I most want to study Helen Keller's and Shakespeare's work.
>
> I'm most interested in "Jane Eyre" by Charlotte Bronte. I don't know which periods it belonged to. I like Jane. I think she is a very common women, but she has a uncommon seeking. She dared to resist wife of mother's brother and brother of cousinship. She is a progressive lady.
>
> And I have read "Farewell, Weapons," which was written by Hemingway. He was a tough man, but he killed himself.

I looked at their responses and thought, I can work with this. For the first week I assigned them "Beowulf," in modern translation.

I taught on the fifth floor of the main teaching building. There were forty-five students to a class, all of them pressed close together behind old wooden desks. Maintaining the room was their responsibility. They washed the blackboards between classes, and twice a week they cleaned the floor and the windows. If the cleaning wasn't adequate, the class was fined. That was how punishments worked at the college. Students were fined for missing morning exercises, for skipping class, for failing examinations, for returning late to their dormitories at night. Very few of them had extra money to spend in this way, so the classrooms were thoroughly cleaned.

It would have been claustrophobic if I hadn't been able to teach with the

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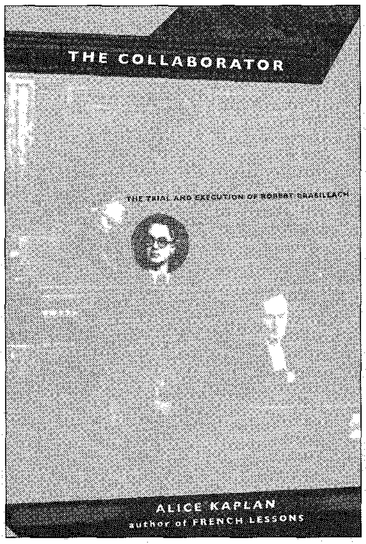

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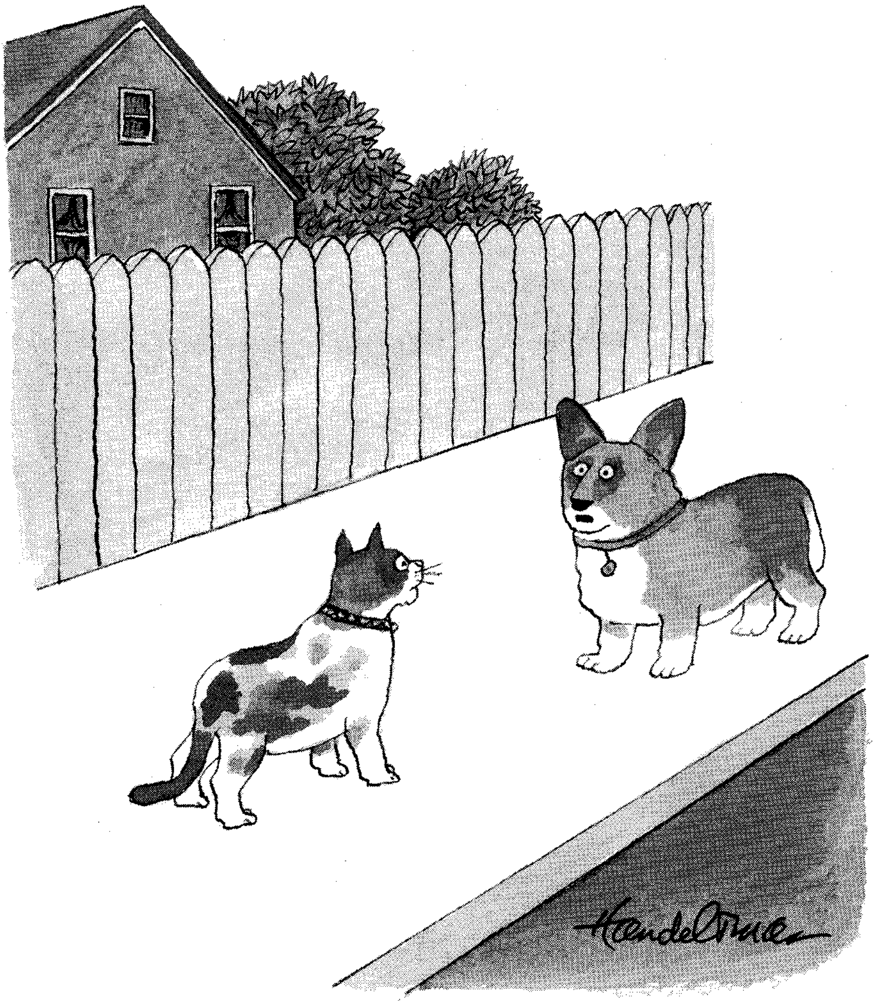

"It's a dog tradition. Every morning and evening, we thank God that we're not cats."

• •

door open. Fortunately, there was plenty of space outside—the building was high on a hill overlooking the Wu River. That was a pretty river, fast and clean-flowing, and it ran from the wild southern mountains of Guizhou province. From the classroom, I could look across the Wu to the main city of Fuling, a tangle of blocky concrete buildings rising up the hillside. And I could also hear the sounds of the city, and the boat horns echoing across the narrow river valley, and the clanking of barges as they unloaded sand onto rumbling trucks at the water's edge. A mile downstream from the college, the Wu died in the brown rush of the Yangtze, and often there was a lonely horn booming out from the big river as a cruiser slipped past on its way to the Three Gorges.

There was always a good breeze off the rivers, which kept the room from becoming unbearably hot. When things got quiet—if I had my students doing a writing assignment, or if they were working smoothly in small groups—I'd gaze out the door at the traffic on the rivers: the little two-man fishing sampans, the crowded ferries crossing from one bank to the other, the big white tourist boats on the Yangtze, the barges hauling coal and gravel north from the upper Wu. There was something deeply satisfying about teaching with that view, and during class I used to look down at the teeming traffic and I'd think, I'm working, too.

Initially, we read very little from the literature text, because even the summaries were too difficult for my students, but it wasn't hard to get at the material from other angles. Often, I told the stories, acting them out with relucnt students I grabbed as "volunteers," nd the classes loved this. In a country here foreigners are often put on tele- sion simply because they are *wai- oren*—"people from outside the country"—my students were entranced by a foreigner who made a performance out f "Gawain and the Green Knight." On ther days, I gave them writing assign- ents; for "Beowulf," they recast the ory from the perspective of Grendel, e monster. Most of the boys wrote about what it was like to eat people, and ow to do it properly, while the girls vrote about how cold and dark the moor was, and how monsters had feelings, too. A student named Grace wrote:

> The warriors said I am a monster, I can't agree with them, but on the contrary I think the warriors and the king are indeed monsters.
>
> You see, they eat delicios foods and drinking every day. Where the foods and drinking come from? They must deprive these things from peasants.
>
> The king and the warriors do nothing but eat delicios foods; the peasants work hard every day, but have bad foods, even many of them have no house to live, like me just live in the moor. So I think the world is unfair, I must change it.
>
> The warriors, I hate them. I will punish them for the poor people. I will ask the warriors build a large room and invited the poor people to live with me.

In college and in graduate school, I had been taught Marxism by a few professors, most of whom came from upper-class backgrounds, were tenured, and earned good salaries. They turned out plenty of commentary, but somehow it didn't have the same bite as Grace's vision of Grendel as a Marxist revolutionary.

Politics is unavoidable at a Chinese college, even if the course is foreign literature, and so my subject became English and American Literature with Chinese Characteristics. We followed "Gawain" with a ballad about Robin Hood, and I asked my students to write a story about what would happen if Robin Hood came to today's China. A few of them followed the Communist Party line:

> Robin Hood comes to and settles in China, leaving his own country. On landing in the territory he is impressed by the peaceful country and friendly, industrious Chinese. He knows that the bright pearl of the East is distinct from England in many aspects. Englishmen have no freedom, no rights. They are oppressed deep by their masters and exploiters and live a dog's life. Moreover, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. He hates such exploiting classes who lead a luxurious life based on plundering the poor cruelly. But he does not seem to be adequate to overthrowing the rule.
>
> However, in China people are masters of the country, serving country is serving people.

But most of them kept Robin Hood busy stealing from corrupt cadres and greedy businessmen. Often, they put him in the booming coastal regions, in the cities of Shenzhen and Guangzhou and Xiamen, where reforms had freed the economy and materialism was king. In these stories, Robin Hood stole from the rich and gave to the peasants and almost invariably ended up in prison. Sometimes he was executed. One student had Robin Hood successfully reëducated during the course of a prison term. Upon his release, he became a detective.

In any event, Robin Hood was almost always caught—my students had no illusions about the idealized green world of Sherwood Forest. There are few thick forests in their part of China, and the police always get their man. I had them debate whether Robin Hood was a good hero for today's China. This question split them right down the middle. Some of them said that he was like Mao Zedong, a revolutionary against injustice—China would be nowhere without people like Robin Hood. Others said that he was a counter-revolutionary—the sort of person who would merely stir up trouble and disturb the economy. They pointed at what had happened during the Cultural Revolution: did you want constant class struggle with Robin Hood in the middle?

Within ten minutes, they were no longer debating Robin Hood; they were arguing about China. Things became heated. I sat in the back, listening to the mess of ideas that they had been taught. Revolution was good—all of them knew that. Mao was a hero, and the Long March had led to liberation, which was the greatest moment in Chinese history. But counter-revolution—Tiananmen Square protesters, pro-democracy activists—was bad; any agitation for change was bad and against the Communist Revolution. To be faithful to the Revolution, you must support the status quo and the Communist Party—that was how you remained revolutionary. Or was it? Robin Hood entangled them for an exhausting hour, every student speaking at least once, some of them

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angrily, and, sitting in the back of the room, I wondered how I could ever make sense of it all.

One thing that I came to understand very early was that Fuling Teachers College served a dual purpose. It trained teachers, but, like any Chinese school, it was also an educational extension of the Chinese Communist Party. Each Fuling student carried a red identity card at all times, and on the front of the card were eight "Student Regulations." The first three were as follows:

> 1. Ardently love the Motherland, support the Chinese Communist Party's leadership, be resolved to serve Socialism's undertaking and serve the people.
> 2. Diligently study Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, progressively establish a Proletariat class viewpoint, authenticate a viewpoint of Historical Materialism.
> 3. Diligently study, work hard to master basic theory, career knowledge, and basic technical ability.

It wasn't by accident that academic study came third. The top priority was political: these students were being trained to be teachers, and as teachers they would train China's next generation, and all this training was done within the framework of Chinese Communism. Everything else was secondary, and if a subject contradicted basic theory it wasn't taught.

First-year students in every department studied Marxism-Leninism. Third-year students took a course on Building Chinese Socialism, oblivious of the fact that the city across the Wu, with its booming private businesses at the one extreme and failing state-owned enterprises at the other, was testimony to the countrywide dismantling of old-style socialism. Fuling wasn't Beijing or Shanghai, where young people tend to be cynical about the Party line. My students took their political meetings and rallies seriously, and they coveted the chance to join the Communist Party. In the English department, there were eight Party members out of ninety third-year students. They were some of the best in the class—the brightest, the most talented, the most socially adept.

The second rule, which emphasized the duty to "authenticate a viewpoint of Historical Materialism," explained a lot about how political theory works in China. I never gained more than a vague understanding of what "historical materialism" means—it has something to do with class struggle—but authenticating it was the key. Not investigating, or contemplating, or analyzing—simply authenticating. Now and then, I asked my students to explain what some of these phrases meant—"historical materialism," "the people's democratic dictatorship," "socialism with Chinese characteristics"—but they were not able to answer in clear, simple language. It was, as Orwell would say, a case in which words and meaning had parted company.

Often, it was difficult to see exactly where I fit into this vision of education. The other Peace Corps volunteer at the college, Adam Meier, taught a course in American society which used a textbook entitled "Survey of Britain and America." Even though the book had been published in 1994, its portrait of America was often unrecognizable. The chapter on American religion didn't mention charities, communities, or schools, but it said quite a bit about the Jonestown mass suicide. In another chapter, "Social Problems," the students read:

> The American society is developing very fast scientifically, while the spirit of the society is becoming more and more hollow, and the society itself more and more corrupted. . . . Many social scientists claim that premarital sexual relations were not unusual among both young men and young women before 1960's. But what is different today is the open acceptance by many young people of a single standard for both sexes before marriage. Some Americans say this is only casual behavior; others may find such an excuse that premarital relations are the natural result of romantic love. This sounds even more ridiculous. The "new morality" is nothing but "immorality." This is the so-called "American civilization."
>
> Homosexuality is a rather strange social phenomenon that most people can hardly understand. It widely spreads. One reason for this may be the despair in marriage or love affairs. Some people fail in marriage and become disappointed with it. So they decide no longer to love the opposite sex, but instead begin to love a person of the same sex as a return of hatred to the opposite. Another reason may be that some people just want to find and do something "new" and "curious," as the Americans are known as adventurous. So they practised homosexuality as a kind of new excitement. Through this, we can see clearly the spiritual hollowness of these people and the distortion of the social order.

The chapter outlined a number of additional problems—racism, sexism, drugs—and then it gave the fundamental reason for America's flaws:

> However, the most important reason is the capitalist system of America. In this capitalist society, although science and technology is highly advanced, some people are suffering from spiritual hollowness. Thus they start to

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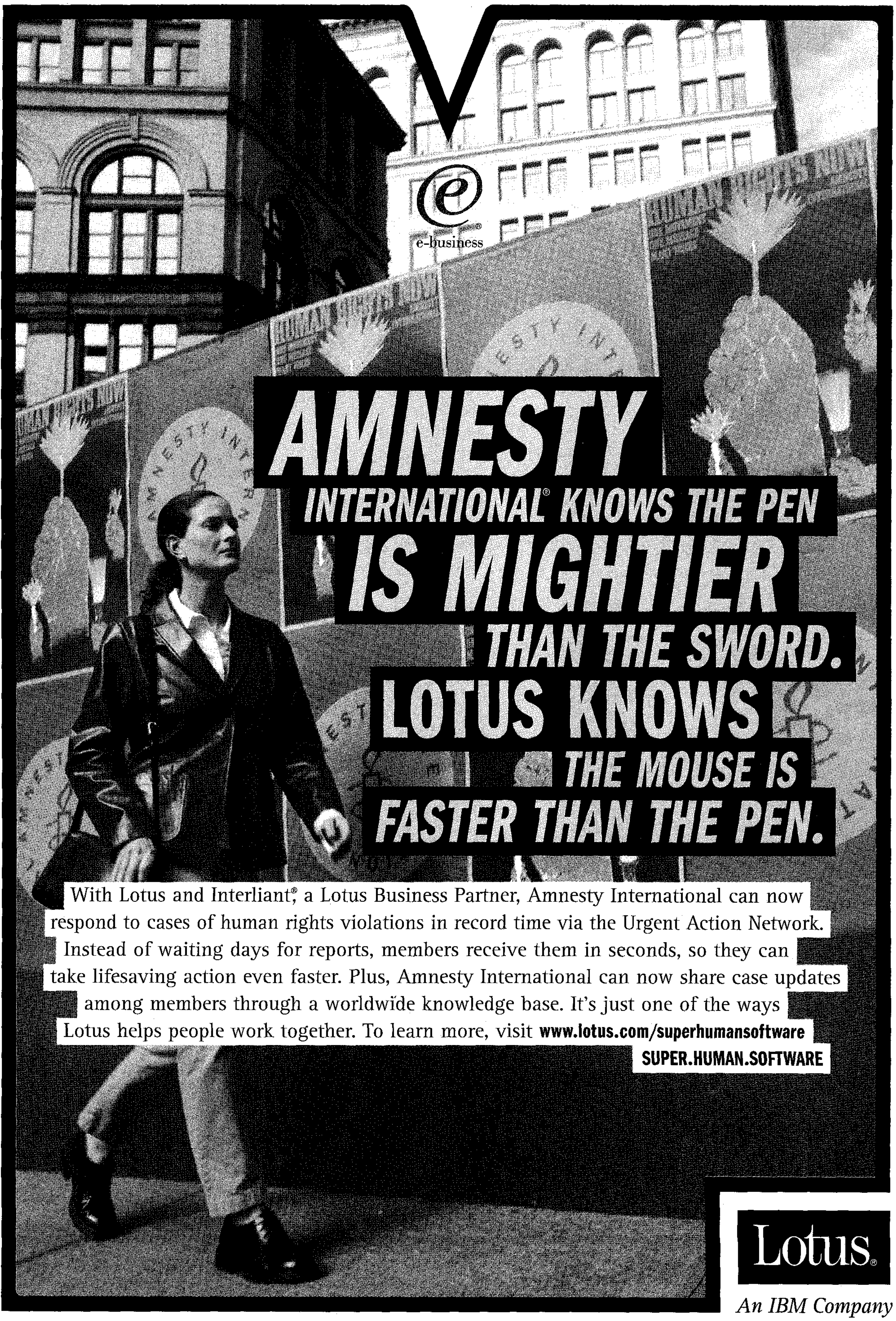

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look for things curious and exciting. Therefore, only when the American capitalist system is ended can all these social problems be solved.

Over time, Adam and I learned how to minimize the politics, to find ways of teaching our subjects that didn't trigger the usual reactions. It was easier for me in literature class, especially when we began working on poetry.

I started with Shakespeare's eighteenth sonnet. First, I defined the sonnet form, reviewed poetic terms, and translated archaic words into modern English. Then, after reading the first line of the poem and outlining the rhyme scheme, I gave them the remaining lines in no particular order. I divided the class into groups and asked each group to put the poem back together, in proper form. I had assumed that the task was impossible; my aim was simply to make the class struggle with the bones of the poem until its structure felt somewhat familiar. But my students were never wary of impossible tasks. They would work at anything without complaint, probably because they knew that even the most difficult assignment was preferable to wading knee-deep in muck behind a water buffalo. The groups studied the broken sonnet while I gazed out at the sampans and barges on the Wu River.

Within an hour, they had it. Some of the groups were merely close to the right order, but a few nailed it from the first line ("Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?") to the last one ("So long lives this, and this gives life to thee").

Now, just as they had put the poem together, they could take it apart. They could scan its rhythm—they knew where the stresses in each line were, and they could find the inconsistencies. They read the poem to themselves and softly beat time on their desks. They *heard* the sonnet. This was something that, in my experience, few American students could do: we no longer read enough poetry to recognize its music. My students in Fuling still had the knack. Nothing had diminished it—not television, not even the devastations of the Cultural Revolution.

Every one of my students could recite at least a dozen Chinese classics by heart—the verses of Du Fu, of Li Bai, of Qu Yuan. Toward the end of the class about Sonnet 18, I asked them, "Was Shakespeare successful? Did the woman he wrote about live forever?" Some of them shook their heads—it was four hundred years ago, after all—but others hesitated. I asked them where the woman had lived.

Armstrong, who answered most of my questions, said, "England."

"And when was that?"

"Around 1600."

"Think about this," I said. "Four centuries ago, Shakespeare loved a woman and wrote a poem about her. He said that he would make her beauty live forever—that was his promise. It is now 1996, and we are in China, in Sichuan, next to the Yangtze River. Shakespeare never came to Fuling. None of you have ever been to England, and you have not seen the woman whom Shakespeare loved four hundred years ago. But right now

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every one of you is thinking about her."

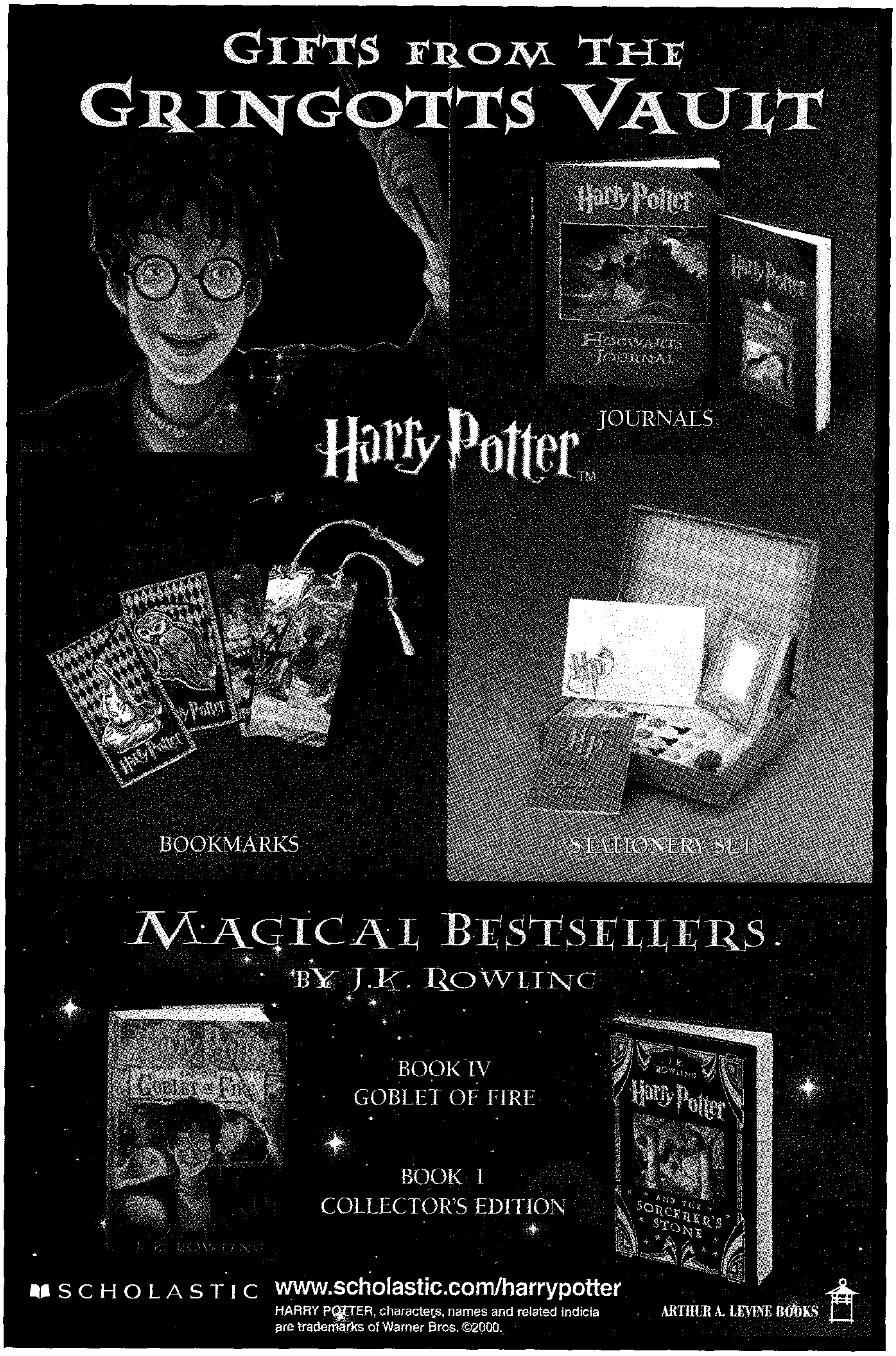
Usually Fuling was a riot of horns and construction projects, but at that moment, in that classroom, it was completely quiet. I asked my students to describe what they saw in that silence—Shakespeare's woman through Chinese eyes:

> Her skin is as white as snow and as smooth as ice. Her long hair is like waterfall. Her little mouth as red as roses, and her eyebrow is like the leaves of willow. Her fingers are so slender that scallions can't compare with them.
>
> She is slim, with long black hair. Her brows are like two leaves of willow. Her lips seem very active. Her skin is white and soft, like cooked fat.
>
> Her skin is so smooth that you will suspect it is made of marble. Her waist is soft as watergrass and her fingers are slim as the root of onion.
>
> She has natural, plain beauty as a woman in the country. She is as pure as a crystal. She looks like a floating poem.

We were exchanging clichés without knowing it. I had no idea that classical Chinese poetry makes scallions of women's fingers, and my students didn't know that the poetic qualities of Sonnet 18 had been reviewed so many times that it nearly died, a poem with a number tagged to its toe. Our exchanges made everything new: there were no dull poems, no overworked plays, no characters who had already been clinically dissected. Nobody groaned when I assigned "Beowulf." As far as they were concerned, it was just a good monster story.

But Party orthodoxy was always hovering just outside the classroom. My students were fond of pointing out that Shakespeare, whenever he criticized Elizabethan greed, spoke for "the proletariat." Several of them said that Hamlet was a great character because he cared deeply about the Danish peasantry. It was good that they were involved with the texts, but I wasn't so enthusiastic about Shakespeare's becoming a Party spokesman. I argued that Hamlet was a great character not because he cared deeply about the peasantry but because he cared deeply and eloquently about himself. And I could et their minds racing by pointing out hat Shakespeare was a petit-bourgeois capitalist who had made his fortune by cquiring stock in a theatre company.

As the semester went on, the political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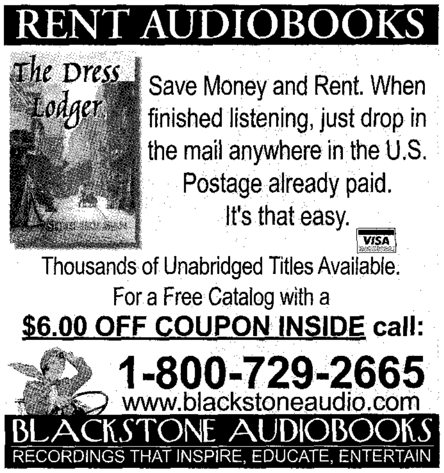
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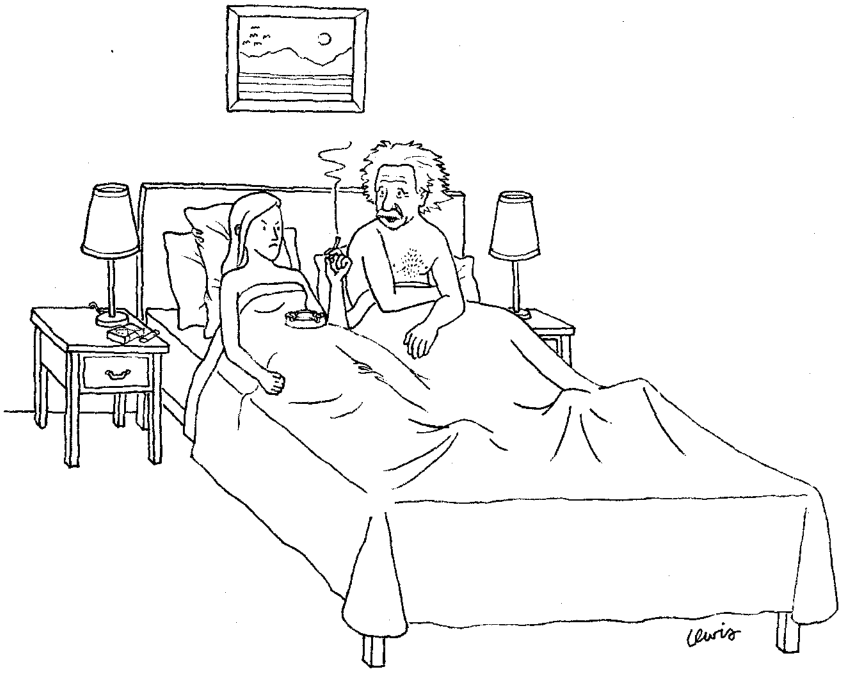


"To you it was fast."

forces outside the classroom seemed to recede, probably because what I was teaching was so new. It didn't bother my students that most of the authors we studied were dead white males, just as they didn't mind that their teacher was a living white male. As far as they were concerned, all of us were simply *waiguoren*.

Their energy was entirely focussed on trying to understand the material. They listened to the way the poetry sounded, and they weighed the characters in the stories. To them, literature wasn't simply an intellectual game of analysis; its figures were real people who had to be judged accordingly. After reading a summary of "Hamlet," a student named Lily wrote in her journal:

> Mr. Hessler, do you like Hamlet? I don't admire him and I dislike him. I think he is too sensitive and conservative and selfish. He should tell the truth to his dear Ophelia and ask her to face and solve the problem together. After all, two lovers should share wealth and woe. What's more, I dislike his hesitation. As a man he should do what he wants to do resolutely.

At my undergraduate college in America, you couldn't simply say, "I don't like Hamlet, because I think he's a lousy person." Everything had to be more sophisticated than that; you had to recognize Hamlet as a character in a *text*, and then you had to consider the critics' opinions. As a student, I was always looking for that moment when a simple and true thought flashes across the mind: I don't like this character. This is a good story. The woman in this poem is beautiful, and I bet her fingers are slim like scallions.

We studied "Hamlet" in October, when the weather was still warm but the autumn rains were beginning to settle in the river valley. I divided my classes into groups, and they spent a day preparing their scenes, and then they performed the play in the classroom. They pushed the teacher's podium to one side of the room and swept the floor, which was the stage. The students who weren't performing crowded their stools and desks into the back, and from there they watched.

In class they could be painfully shy, but acting transformed them. They were incorrigible overactors. Every gesture was exaggerated, every emotion overblown. I had grown accustomed to their shyness, and it was strange to watch them shout and cry on the bare stage of the classroom. I thought that perhaps it had something to do with the influence of traditional Chinese opera, but more likely it was simply a means of releasing themselves in a society in which emotions are rarely expressed openly.

Roger played the dead king's ghost—a writhing, howling spirit in a brightly painted, cone-shaped Chinese emperor's crown that he had made out of papier-mâché. In any performance of "Hamlet," it is the ghost who sets the tone for the play, and so it was with Roger in his imperial crown—a touch of China in old Denmark.

In the second scene, Hamlet appeared before Gertrude and Claudius, who were played by Jane and Sally. Romance was always a knotty issue for my students; even the most casual public contact between the sexes was taboo, and playing a wife or a girlfriend was too embarrassing for most of the female students. Often, they simplified it as Jane and Sally did, by making the couple the same sex. In China, it was common for friends to be openly affectionate with each other. And so Sally stroked Jane's hair, and Jane fondled Sally's arm, and then, realizing that Hamlet was glaring at them, Sally said imperiously, "How is it that the clouds still hang on you?"

And Hamlet—played, in this scene, by Barber, a nervous boy in thick glasses—replied, "Not so, my lord, I am too much in the sun."

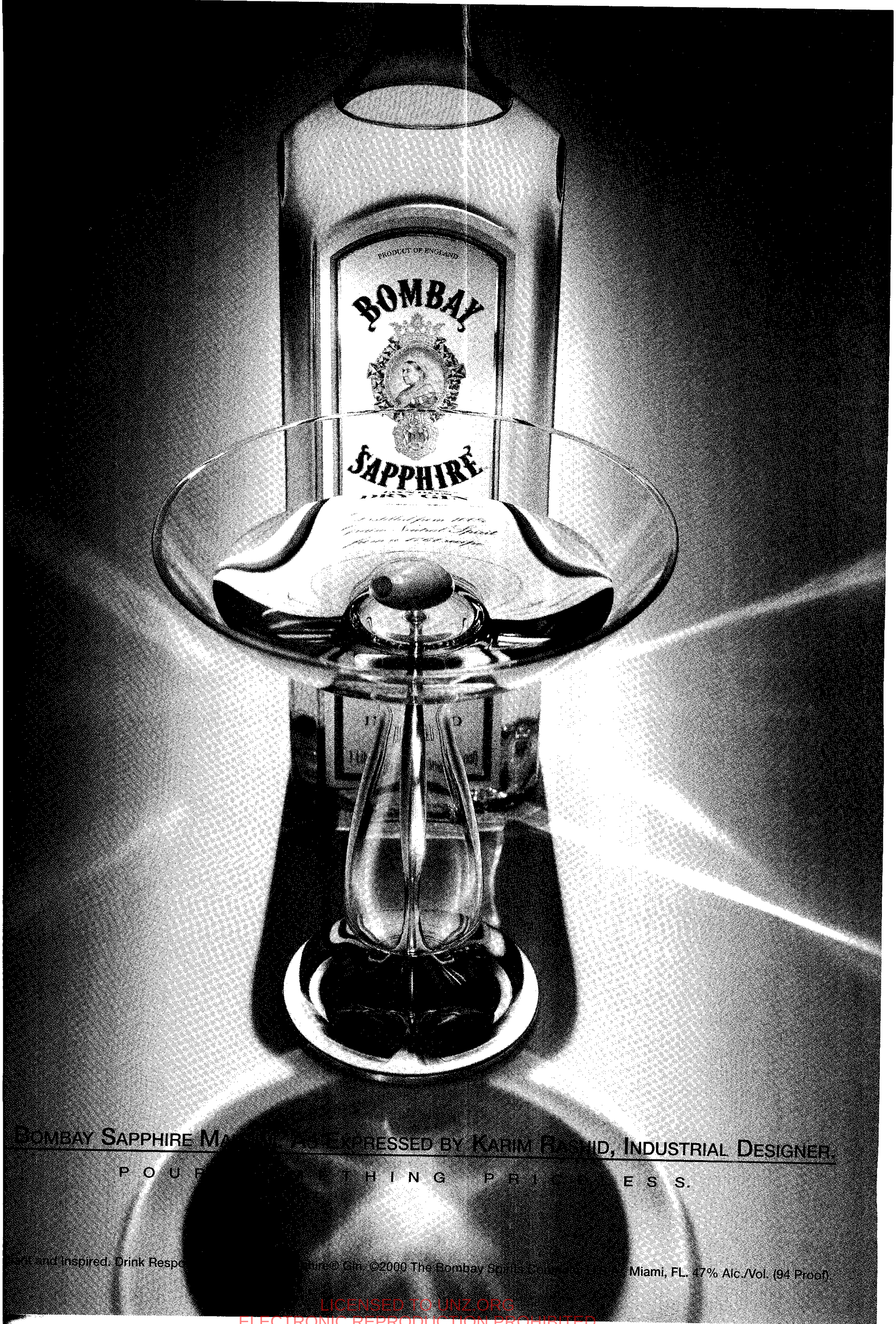
Jane ran her hand along Sally's thigh. Both of them were pretty girls, their long hair brushed smooth, like black silk. Barber scowled. Jane pressed close against Sally, and then she said, purringly:

> Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted color off,
> And let thine eye look like a friend on
> Denmark.
> Don't continue to be sad for your father,
> You know that every man must die.

They wrote much of the dialogue themselves; the language of the play was too difficult, and they used only the most famous lines in the original, writing the rest in colloquial speech. Hamlet's famous Act III soliloquy was performed by Soddy, the class monitor, who stood alone in front of the class and said:

> To be, or not to be, that is the question:
> Whether it's better to do nothing and suffer,
> Or whether I should struggle against
> Claudius
> And end these troubles.

He was a big kid with a lazy eye, from the countryside of northern Sichuan, and the other students called him Lao Da—Big Brother, a nickname from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Hong Kong gangster films, a term of respect which reflected Soddy's authority. But despite his high position in the class hierarchy—he was a Party member, as well as the class monitor—Soddy was a relatively poor student. His writing was fine, but his spoken English was bad, and in class he had no confidence. He rarely spoke out or answered questions.

Until the day Soddy stood in front of us and played Hamlet, I had never understood why the students respected him so much. His English was still poor; he stumbled over the soliloquy, and some of it was unintelligible. But none of that mattered, because now his talent was suddenly palpable; it was as if he had reached out and caught hold of his gift in the palm of his hand, turning it over once or twice, holding it as surely as he held our attention. He was slow, deliberate. He paced the room, and in his movements there were traces of Sichuan opera—a cloak folded just so over the crook of his arm; a wooden stool laid on its side and used as the focus of his wanderings, until he made a palace of that simple prop. But, mostly, it was his voice that was perfect—he controlled the cadence and tone of his speech, the way Hamlet's emotions rise and ebb. And Soddy knew how to use both noise and silence, to shout in frustration and then let the words resound in the classroom that he cleaned every week. He paced restlessly; he crouched on the stool; he buried his head in his hands; he roared and shouted; he kicked at the stool; and suddenly he was silent—and then, once the silence was complete, he said, quietly:

Thus conscience does make cowards of us
all,
And thus we want to do something
But our thoughts prevent us
And lose the name of action.

The students watched with rapt attention, and, at the end, they applauded madly. For the rest of the year, whenever I looked at Soddy, at his square jaw and his cockeyed gaze and his dark complexion, I saw the Prince of Denmark.

They especially loved the characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They loved their hapless prying, and they loved their demise—the way that Hamlet's two friends were tricked into carrying their own death warrants to the King of England. Perhaps it reminded them of what had happened to Mao Zedong's Defense Minister, Lin Biao, who tried to turn the Cultural Revolution to his own purposes and, in the end, became one of its victims.

The play ended in a flurry of swordplay and kung-fu kicks—Laertes and Hamlet and Claudius involved in what seemed like the climax of a Hong Kong martial-arts film—until, finally, only Hamlet and Horatio stood in front of the class. They were played by Vic and Lazy, both of whom were dressed in cheap suits, and before beginning the scene they had carefully spread newspaper over the floor so that the Prince could die without getting dirty. The class giggled, then the scene began, and Lazy leaned against the wall and held the dying Hamlet, and everybody was hushed.

Lazy cradled him close, as if he were a child, and yet the contact was natural because Chinese men are allowed to touch each other in this way. The class was silent, watching. The actors were small men, and, alone on the classroom floor, they looked even smaller, crouched below the peeling paint and the dusty blackboard. Hamlet groaned, tried to speak, and coughed out:

I cannot live to hear the news from England,
But I support Fortinbras. He has my dying
voice.
So tell him that—the rest is silence.

And Lazy, holding Hamlet tenderly and murmuring softly, sadly, lazily, said:

Good night, sweet prince,
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!

The late-autumn mists fell over the rivers, and the classrooms grew colder. They weren't heated—few public buildings in Fuling were—and finally I took to closing the door when I taught. The students started wearing coats, scarves, gloves; their fingers swelled with chilblains, and their ears turned red. I could see their breath in the cold, crowded room. We read Swift, Wordsworth, Byron. The verses resounded with sweet regularity as we recited them aloud—iambic puffs of steam rising up toward the ceiling.

They begged me to assign another Shakespeare play, and at last I did, partly o keep warm. I summarized “Romeo nd Juliet,” and then they played it. Soddy and his classmates built a balcony out of desks—an unstable tower upon which Lucy stood bravely, while Soddy courted her from below. Six scenes later, Grace gave Juliet’s soliloquy as she prepared to take the Friar’s sleeping potion. Her family was against her, and Romeo had been exiled, and in the middle of the cene Grace began to cry. She was a vely girl, one of my favorite students, ecause she always spoke her mind without fear of embarrassment. Chinese irls weren’t supposed to be like that, but Grace didn’t care. On the day that she layed Juliet, her long black hair was ulled back past her shoulders, and her yes shone bright with tears.

A few days earlier, I had noticed Si-nce Hill standing apart from his group. am always silent,” he had explained ack in September, when I first asked im about his name. But he wrote beau-fully, a thoughtful young man from a llage of two hundred and fifty people, nd he always had a soft smile on his orn face. On the day that I noticed m standing alone, he was smiling and aring fixedly at the text of “Romeo and liet.” I asked him what he was looking , and without a word he pointed at two Juliet’s lines:

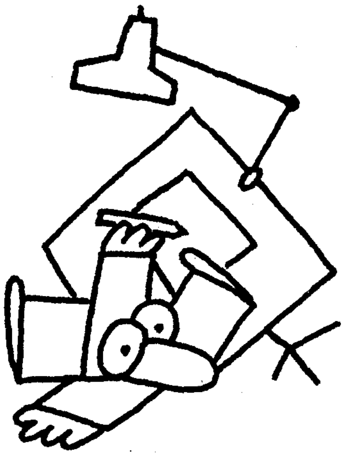
My only love sprung from my only hate!
Too early seen unknown, and known too
late!

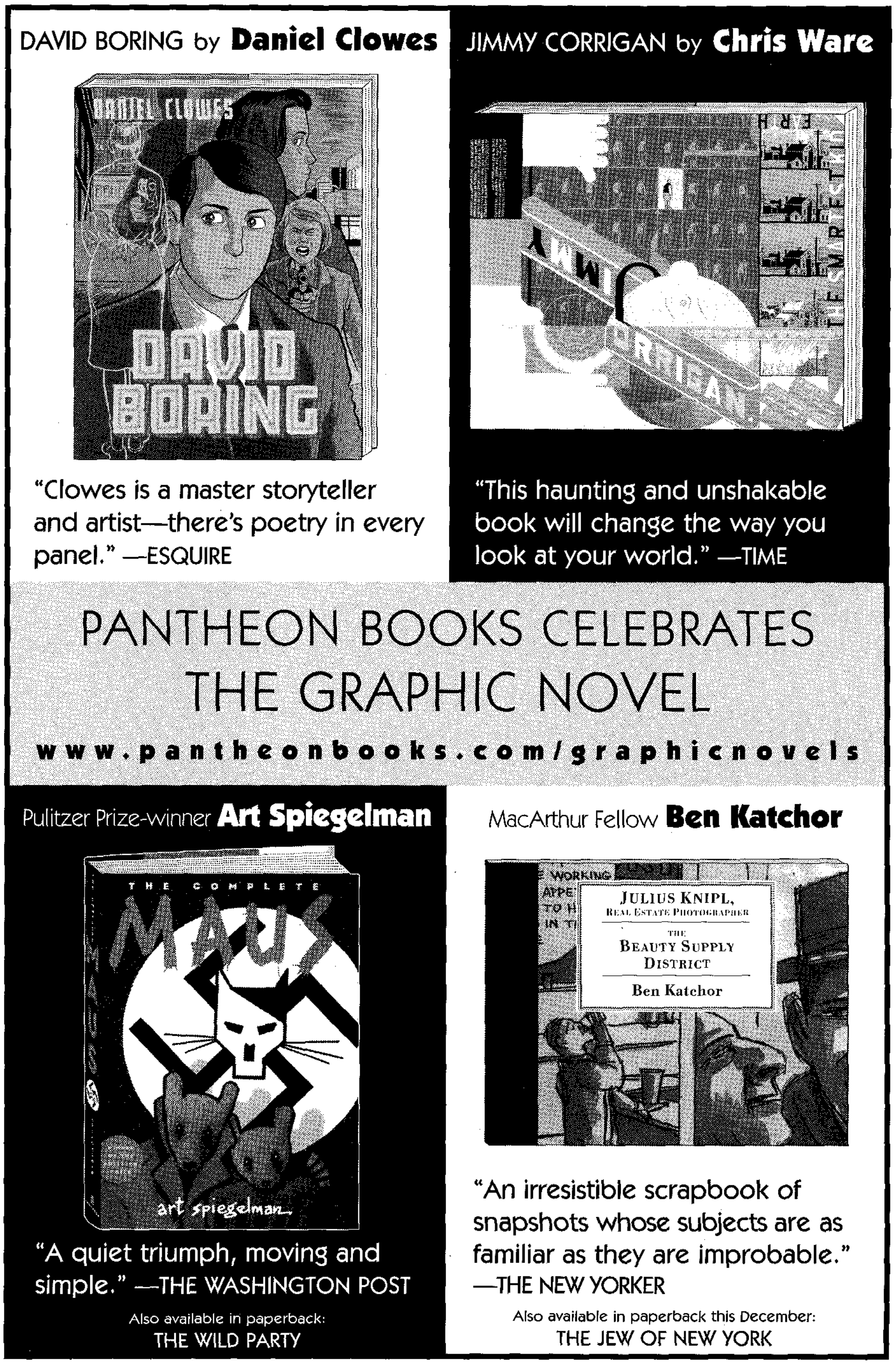
“Do you understand what that eans?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said. “I think it’s very autiful.”

I looked at the lines again.

“I think you’re right,” I said. ♦





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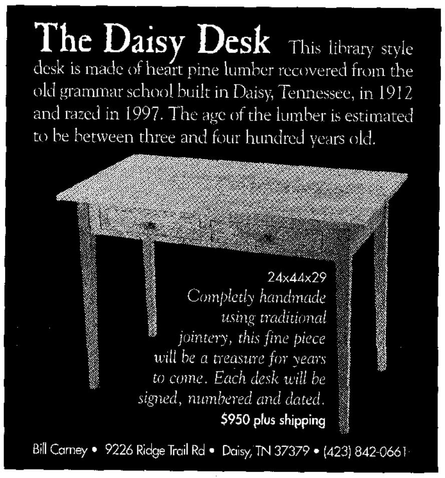

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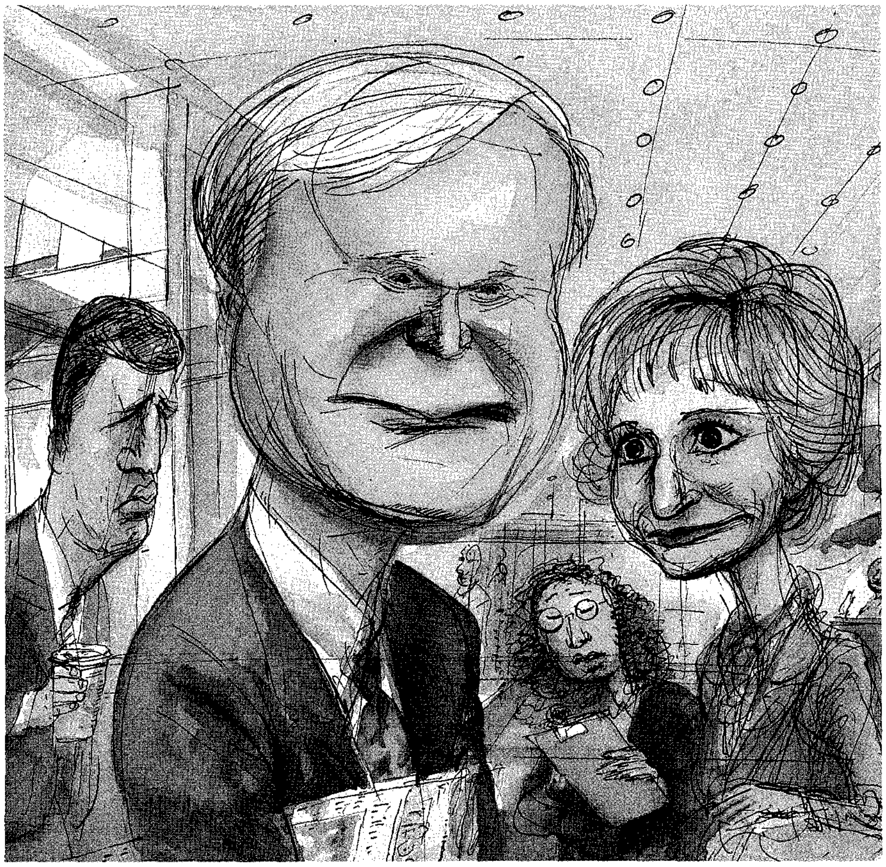
ANNALS OF JOURNALISM

LIVE FROM 400

Navigating the ground zero of punditry.

BY DAVID BROOKS



In the studios, hundreds of people work to achieve the perfect talk-show moment.

RICHARD THOMPSON

If politics, as the saying goes, is show business for ugly people, then political punditry—the epicenter of which is a building in Washington, D.C., known as, and located at, 400 North Capitol Street—is show business for people whose looks range from nondescript to O.K. So it was kind of startling the other day, when I stopped by the backstage greenroom of MSNBC's "Hardball with Chris Matthews," to find myself in close proximity to a couple of incredibly handsome men. One of them was Senator Evan Bayh, of Indiana, whom *People* magazine called one of the fifty most beautiful people in America. The other, surrounded by a klatsch of giggling MSNBC employees, was Tom Selleck, who was on the program to promote his cable movie "Running Mates." Bayh stood unmolested, but people kept popping in to get their picture taken with Selleck, who, after all, was not a mere senator but an actual actor.

Cable talk shows have their own rules, and the star of that night's "Hardball" was not Tom Selleck or Evan Bayh—or even Jesse Jackson or Al Sharpton, who were also on the broadcast. The star was Al From. From is the president of the Democratic Leadership Council, the centrist policy group that helped launch the careers of Bill Clinton, Al Gore, and Joe Lieberman. When From did his segment with Matthews that evening, he didn't chat and parry, the way the other guests had done. He confronted. He scuffed it up with Katrina vanden Heuvel, the editor of *The Nation*, in a classic skirmish between a New Democrat and a traditional liberal. "You don't know *anything* about the D.L.C., so you ought to keep quiet," From barked at vanden Heuvel. "I think your talk of helping the poor in this country is obscene," she snapped back.

At that point, all motion in the greenroom ceased. From had created one of those perfect talk-show moments, when all eyes are suddenly riveted, when attention must be paid. There's a phrase in the pundit world to describe a talk-show guest who achieves this apex of total fixation: he has "come to play."

At 400 North Capitol Street, hundreds of people work every day to achieve these galvanizing moments. The building, a squat nineteen-seventies cube of glass and white marble, sits about halfway between Union Station and the United States Capitol. "Hardball with Chris Matthews" is broadcast from the eighth floor of 400 North Capitol, in the MSNBC studios, as is "Equal Time" and "The Mitchell Report" with Andrea Mitchell. The Fox News Channel has a studio on five, where it puts out "Special Report with Brit Hume," "The Beltway Boys," and "Fox News Sunday." C-SPAN is on six, as is UniVision. The COX network, which owns a group of local affiliate stations, is on seven. Telemundo, the Spanish-language network, is on the third floor. The Washington News Network is on one. In other words, 400 North Capitol is ground zero of the cable-TV opinion industry.

The elevators in 400 North Capitol are sometimes packed with senators, Cabinet officers, and political candidates in full makeup, going from network to network, doing one show after another. For Pat Buchanan, the building is the hustings. Riding up and down the elevator is the equivalent of a campaign trip: he can reach more people by hitting three programs than he could in a month of real campaigning.

I was at 400 North Capitol on January 21, 1998, the day the Lewinsky scandal broke, and the pundits were streaming in and out of the place like commuters at Grand Central. You couldn't have swung an axe in the hallways that day without hitting party strategists, op-ed columnists, former federal prosecutors, and media consultants anxiously memorizing their spontaneous on-air quips.

Before 400 North Capitol became central casting for cable news, it was best

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known as the Hall of States, because many state governments have lobbying offices there. The secret to the building's transformation is its windows: the offices on the south façade have sweeping views of the Capitol. Until very recently, glass created problems for cameramen, but now technicians have figured out how to eliminate reflections by fitting filters over windows, so a room with a view has become an ideal TV studio.

A few years ago, Brian Lamb, the founder of C-SPAN, moved his main studio to a sixth-floor conference room at 400 North Capitol, with a spectacular view of the Capitol's dome. Other networks noticed, and leased space in the building. Now you can channel surf and see the same view of the Capitol dome on show after show, at slightly different elevations.

The main burst of pundit-related activity at 400 North Capitol begins each day at around 10:30 A.M., when the producers and hosts of the talk shows meet to plan the day's programs. Producers are generally twenty-five-to-thirty-five-year-old teleserfs, and it is their job to shepherd the day's designated egos into the studios in the proper order. Before noon, phones across Washington start ringing as the producers cast their lines for the day's perfect guest. If Mongolia is in the news, then the English-speaking world's four articulate Mongolia experts will have fielded fifteen interview requests by lunchtime, more than they may have received over the previous two years. If the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue has just come out, producers have to resort to fourth-tier pundits, people who are so eager to be on television that they're willing to talk about tankinis. In an election season, the ritual is more intricate—more like high school in the weeks just before the senior prom. Producers compete to get high-status guests; potential guests compete to appear on high-status shows. Each side maneuvers furiously to get the best date. (As a part-time pundit, I have to admit that I engage in the ritual, too.) Although it's considered bad form for a guest to invite himself onto a show, senators sometimes order their press secretaries to try.

The producers have the advantage, until the early afternoon. There are about four thousand potential pundits out there, and about forty guest slots for the evening shows, and producers plow through their Rolodexes, skipping the overexposed spinners (like James Carville), unless they can't get one of the hot insiders (right now it's Bush's chief strategist, Karl Rove), or mulling whether they should take a stab at one of those few journalists, like Maureen Dowd or Michael Kelly, who, as a result of some genetic mutation, actually aren't interested in being on television. Producers often book too many people, and, according to the etiquette of the industry, it is acceptable to disinvite a low-status guest if a higher-status one becomes available. The producer will just call up the suddenly expendable talking head and say, "We've decided to take the show in a different direction"—i.e., away from you, you pathetic loser.

By midafternoon, the balance of

Was.

ower shifts toward the guests. If it's three 'clock and a producer hasn't filled all her egments, a tremor of panic in her voice is dible as she makes another round of lls. The producer really has nothing to ffer; unless a pundit has an exclusive ntract, the shows don't pay anything. 'll send over a car and driver," the pro- cer will plead, on the theory that some ople find a ride through Washington affic in the back seat of a Lincoln Town ar with a little reading light an attractive ternative to dinner at home. A desperate oducer will start telling potential guests ings that, outside Washington, might considered untruths: "You'll be on with enry Kissinger," or "You'll be on at the p of the show—we'll have you out in n minutes." In any case, the pundit ten agrees to fill in, because the pro- cer is offering something that both of em are too polite to acknowledge: air- ne, the narcotic of the pundit class.

Nothing is worse for a producer than se times when everyone is after the ne guest. On September 12th, the *Times* ran a story on its front page about the appearance of the word "rats" in a Bush-for-President ad. That day, every producer in America tried to get the man responsible for the spot, Alex Castellanos. Jacqueline Pham, a no-nonsense producer for Brit Hume, at Fox, called Castellanos's office to book him. (She's also worked at C-SPAN and MSNBC, making her the winner of the 400 North Capitol trifecta.) Castellanos's people directed her to the Republican National Committee, where a press officer told her that Castellanos wasn't available. Then she saw that CNN was promoting an interview with him on that night's "Inside Politics," and she learned that he'd also agreed to do Andrea Mitchell's show, on MSNBC. Networks try to avoid booking guests who are on competing programs, but this was a frenzy. So Pham called back the R.N.C. and insisted that it deliver Castellanos for Fox. He ended up appearing on CNN, and then raced a few hundred yards to 400 North Capitol, where he appeared on Fox and MSNBC back to back.

Guests are expected to show up twenty minutes before their live segments, but many pundits ignore this request. Frantic producers then have to coax the latecomers into the greenroom, over to the makeup room, and across the hall to the studio. It's normal for a politician to arrive with one obsequious aide, but it's gauche to travel with six. Ross Perot used to shock producers by arriving at the studio alone.

The greenrooms at 400 North Capitol are neat but unadorned. There's always a TV, tuned to the channel you are about to appear on. (It's not polite to zap to something more interesting.) C-SPAN has posters in the corridor which trace the route of Tocqueville's American tour, MSNBC has a company logo, and Fox's greenroom walls are plastered with photographs of Washington figures, such as James Baker and John McCain, who have appeared on the network. These pictures were taken *in flagrante pundicto*—the subjects have their mouths open and their fingers wagging in the air.

The greenrooms are noisy, because

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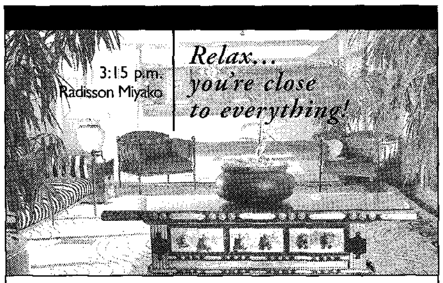

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once you've got a gaggle of professional pontificators in a state of preshow arousal there is no way to control the bonhomie. Deep-voiced, self-confident opinionists in camera-friendly blue shirts will bellow at each other, wisecrack at the television monitors, and try to outdo one another with displays of political trivia.

Into this atmosphere of greenroom towel snapping, a makeup person, usually a woman, will intrude, to summon guests one by one to her chair. The most in-demand pundits know which shade of makeup base best complements their skin. But let the record show that when I was observing the process at Fox the *Weekly Standard's* Fred Barnes was not aware that his regular makeup color is Fawn Beige, and *U.S. News & World Report's* Michael Barone did not know that his ideal tones are Country and Midwestern Beige. (I recently learned that my best shade is Golden Latte.)

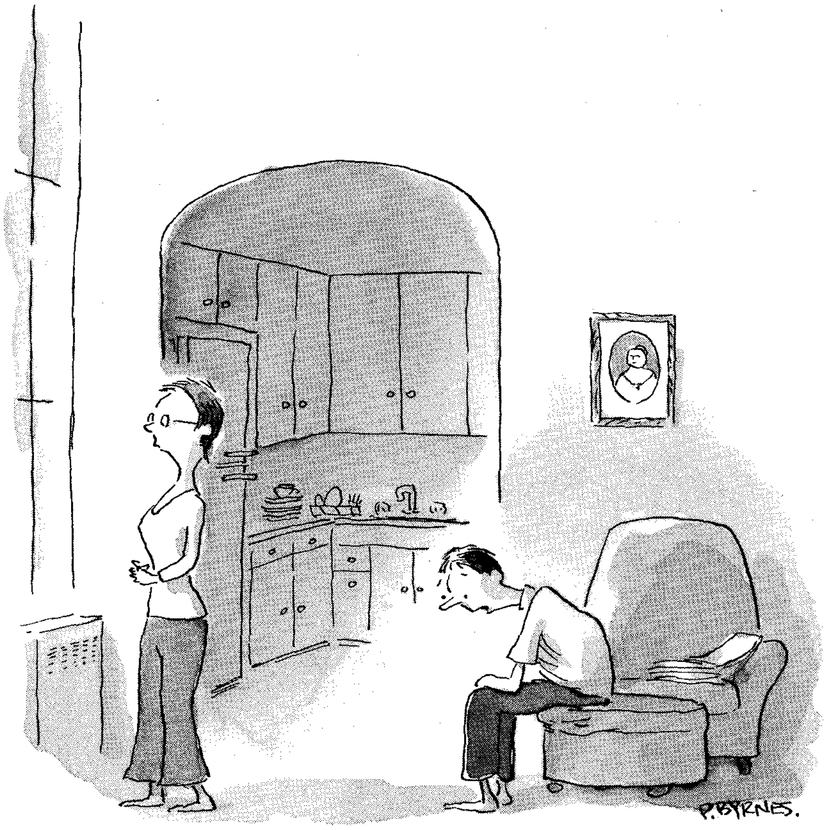
After the makeup is applied and during a commercial break, a producer will lead the next segment's guests through a soundproof door and into the presence of the host. Each studio is dark on the fringes, with bright klieg lights illuminating the center, where the host sits on his or her throne. It is like walking in on a monarch.

Chris Matthews is a revolutionary figure among hosts; he not only presides over his guests but plays the role of master gladiator. John Fund, a *Wall Street Journal* editorialist, says, "Chris will sometimes ask a question. Then he'll answer it. Then he'll ask you what you think of his answer."

There are seven segments on each "Hardball" show. The A and B segments are for newsmakers, members of Congress, governors, and the like. The C segment is just Matthews talking. The D segment usually features a business or high-tech leader. E, F, and G are given over to the pundits.

"Our show replaces the argument at the dinner table and the pub," Matthews says. "And the evening paper. I remember my grandpop coming home with the evening paper. There wasn't much news in it, but lots of argument and analysis."

After a pundit is escorted to his seat, as many as three sets of hands will descend on him, one to slither an earpiece wire up the inside of his jacket (some pundits have their own earpieces, custom-molded to their heads), one to run a microphone wire down his shirt, and one to touch up his makeup. He'll probably try to make some human contact with the host, who usually has the glassy stare of one who



"I don't want to treat you like dirt, but I don't want to lose you, either."

In the body of a fierce

Warrior,

lived the insight of a seasoned

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Vikings

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is listening to the special control-room voices that mere guests are not fit to hear.

Then the segment starts. The pundits give wry smiles to the camera while being introduced, they tilt their heads down to display their impressive TV pundit hair, and then the host swivels toward them and suddenly it's adrenaline time. Doing a six-minute segment is like being in a downhill ski race. You had better have prepared your observations, because you don't have time to think; you just have time to swish and swerve. And on TV you have to say everything with three times more energy than you use in regular conversation. It all rushes by so quickly that you sometimes find yourself falling into the kind of clichés you ridicule others for: "Well, you know, Andrea, I've been out talking to voters, and from what I'm hearing . . . My sources inside the Administration tell me . . . Well, Brit, I just don't see an endgame here." Anything to keep your conversation fluid. Sometimes in the middle of a segment a panelist will have an out-of-body experience: his soul will float up to the ceiling and he'll look down on himself and contemplate the fact that with one four-letter word or one ethnic slur he could end his TV career forever—autopundicide. But then he'll snap back to attention and rejoin the fray. If the pundits get to the end of their segment without falling on their faces, they experience a wave of elation, and they tumble out of the studio saying how well it went. (To judge by post-segment chatter, there's never been a bad television show.)

Journalists who devote themselves to punditry invent all sorts of rationalizations for why they do it. It helps get speaking engagements. Your phone calls are returned more quickly. But the real reason to do it is that it's fun. You get the satisfaction of having your say, and you get the thrill of being sort of famous for a few minutes, and possibly not looking like a total idiot. When you do a show that's all attitude and leering, you come out of the studio feeling as if you'd just taken part in some malicious prank—dirty and ashamed. But if you get to talk about something you've reported on, or have actually thought about, the visceral jolt is more intense than anything that print journalism offers. (That's the real corruption of punditry: it can give you the psychic satisfaction of print with one per cent of the effort.)

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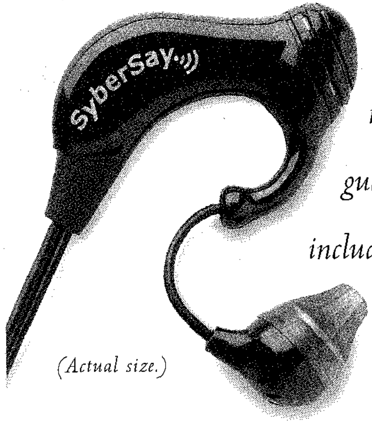

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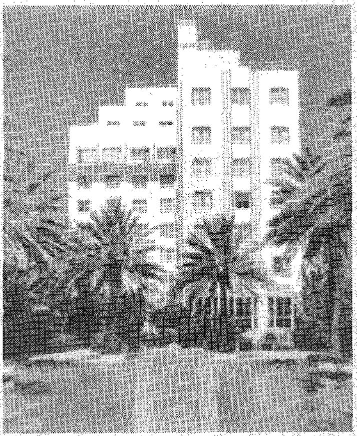

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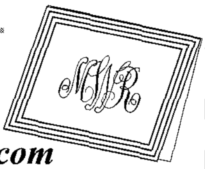

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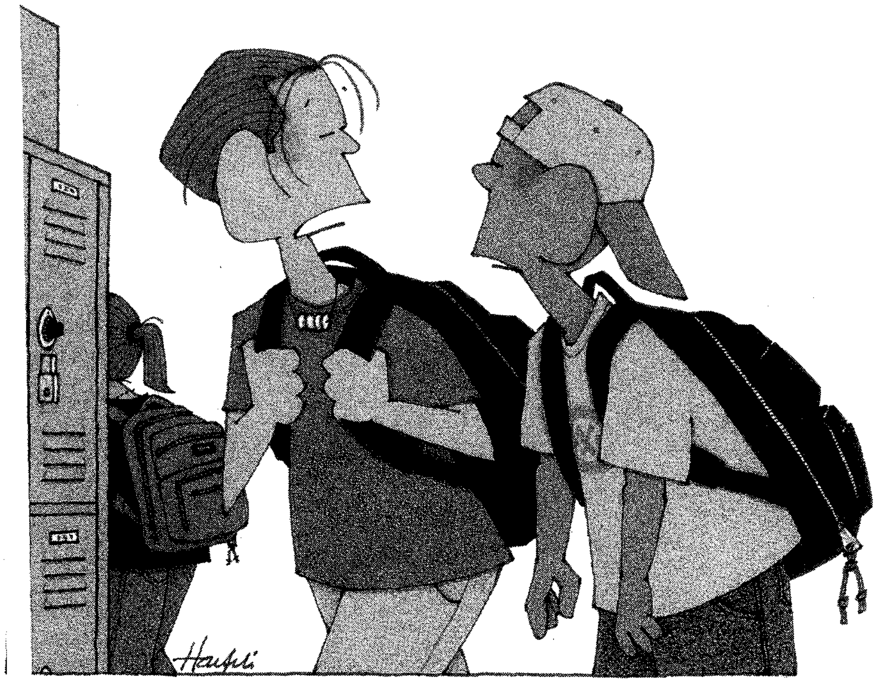

"If nothing else, school has prepared me for a lifetime of backpacking."

• •

When MSNBC and Fox News s ted, about four years ago, they tried t nodernize political talk. MSNBC p together panels of attractive young p idits-in-training called "the Friends." T e Friends would sit backstage for h rs, and when something happened in tl news they'd be wheeled out for "in- st t analysis." The Friends were a fail- u and cable networks realized that there ju aren't millions of people who want tc vatch political talk every night, even if involves miniskirted telebabes. In A ust, according to the Nielsen ratings, d ng prime time an average of two h dred and sixty-three thousand homes w tuned to MSNBC. This audience m not be huge in TV terms ("Dharma & Greg," late August's No. 20-rated pr ie-time show, attracted 6.94 million hc seholds) but they comprise viewers wl are genuinely knowledgeable about pc ics. The people who now host the ca shows at 400 North Capitol are re ournalists, and their guests are con- ve onal but better informed.

leven days before the election, I stc ped by the MSNBC studio to watch Cl s Matthews tape "Hardball." He'd alr dy done his newsmaker segments, an he was starting the pundit panel, wh h included the pollster Patrick Caddell, the TV journalist Norah O'Donnell, and David Dreier. Dreier is actually a Republican congressman. He's chairman of the House Rules Committee, and so he's one of the most powerful members of Congress. But he's such a 400 North Capitol regular that he's been promoted in the minds of the producers to pundit. And he's good at it. When Dreier started talking on the air, Matthews interrupted him every few seconds, boisterously repeating something Dreier had just said, for emphasis: "Magic word, technology!" The segment ended with Dreier attacking Gore. Matthews laughed: "You've got your talking points today, don't you?" Then he cut to a commercial.

Dreier was miffed. Matthews had, in effect, just accused him of being a mere politician, not a pundit. "I told you I would *never* bring talking points here! Don't give me that," he said. When they were back on the air, Matthews made a halfhearted apology. But Dreier was still annoyed, and he threw his notes across the table at Matthews.

Once upon a time, it was more prestigious to be a congressional chairman than a pundit. But these days politicians don't seem satisfied with the endless drudgery of legislating. They want to be the ones over at 400 North Capitol, coming to play. ♦

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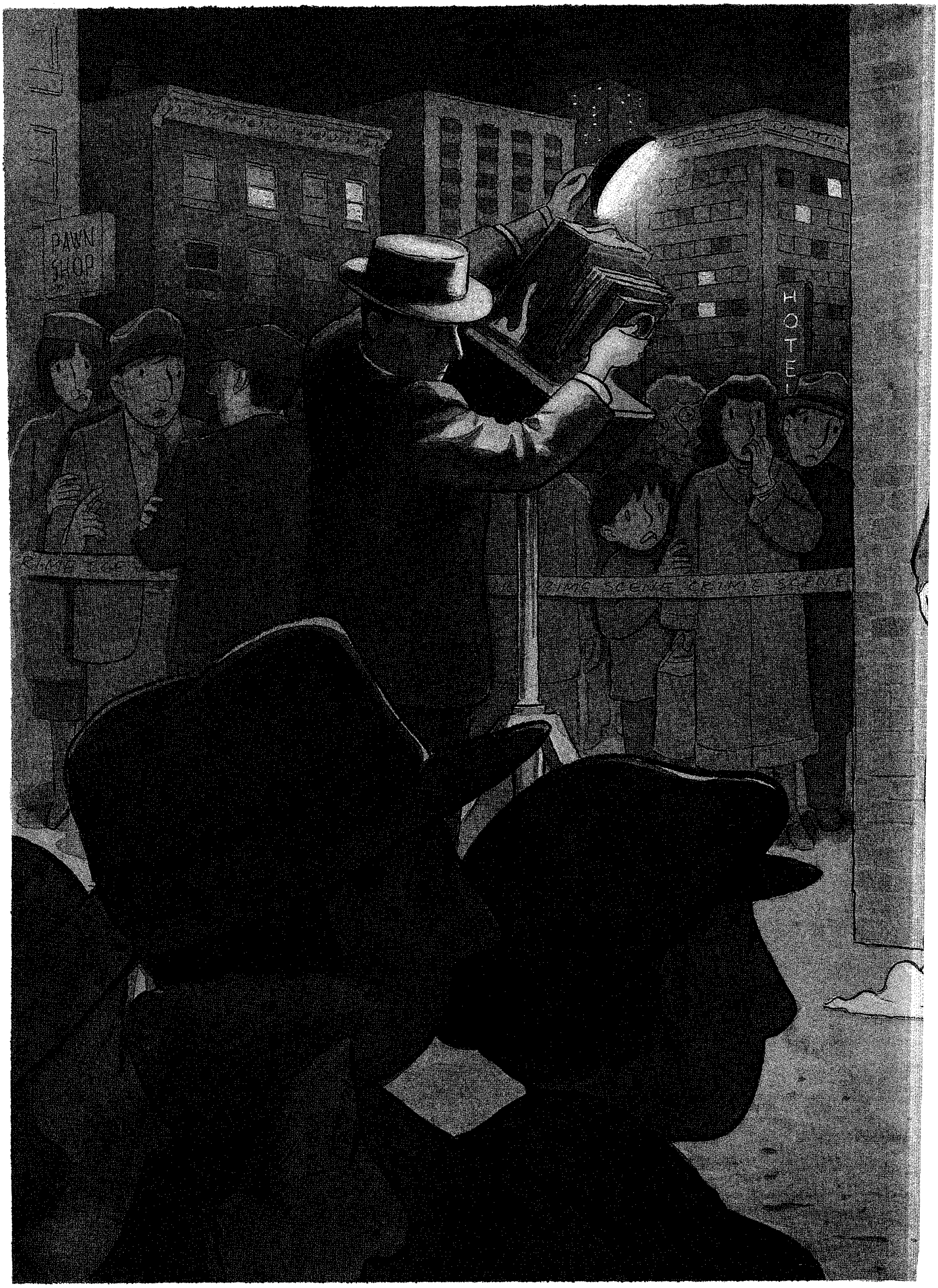
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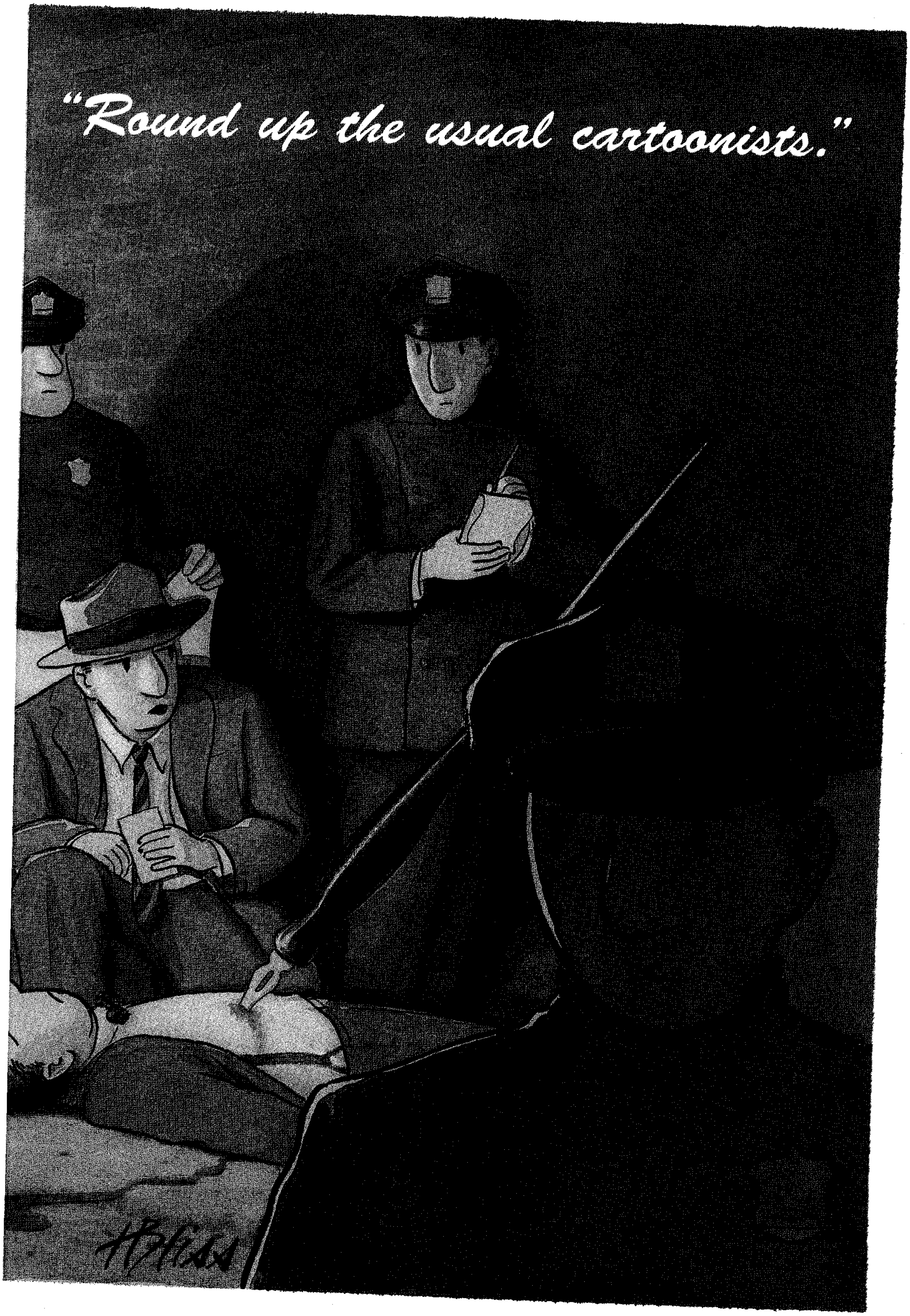
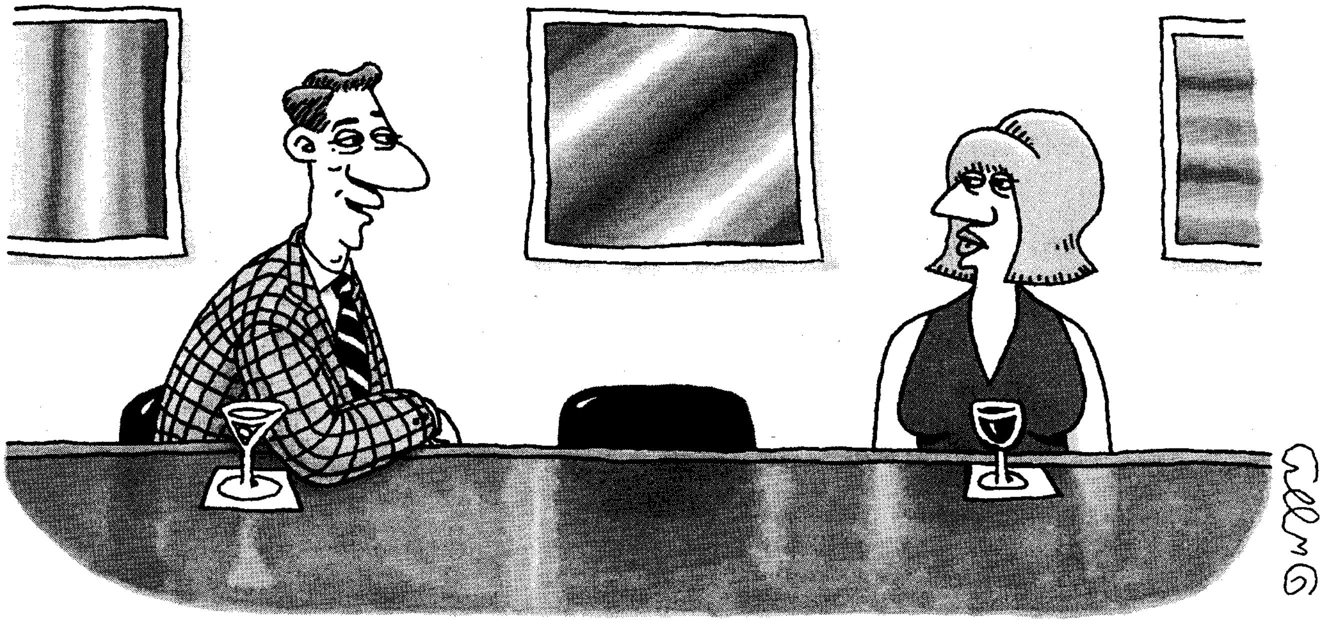
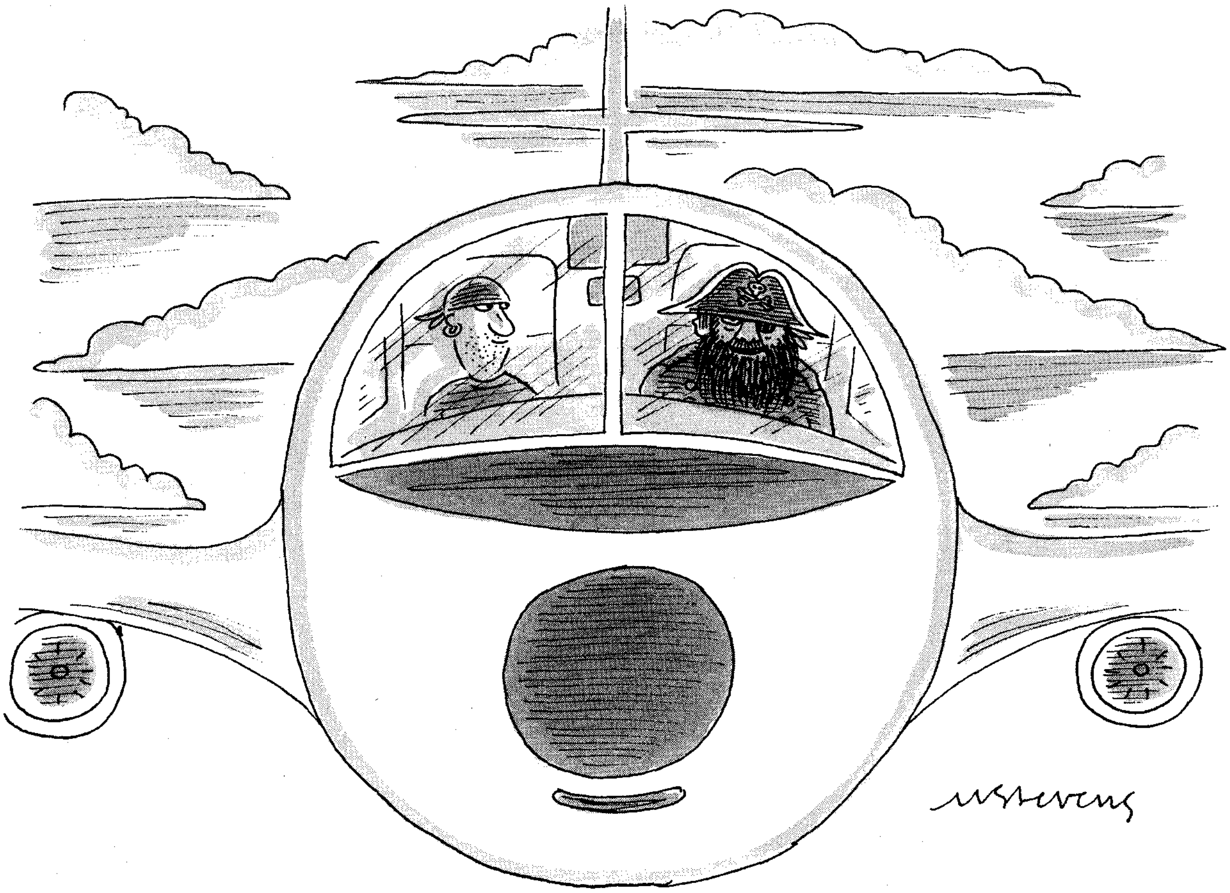


"Round up the usual cartoonists."

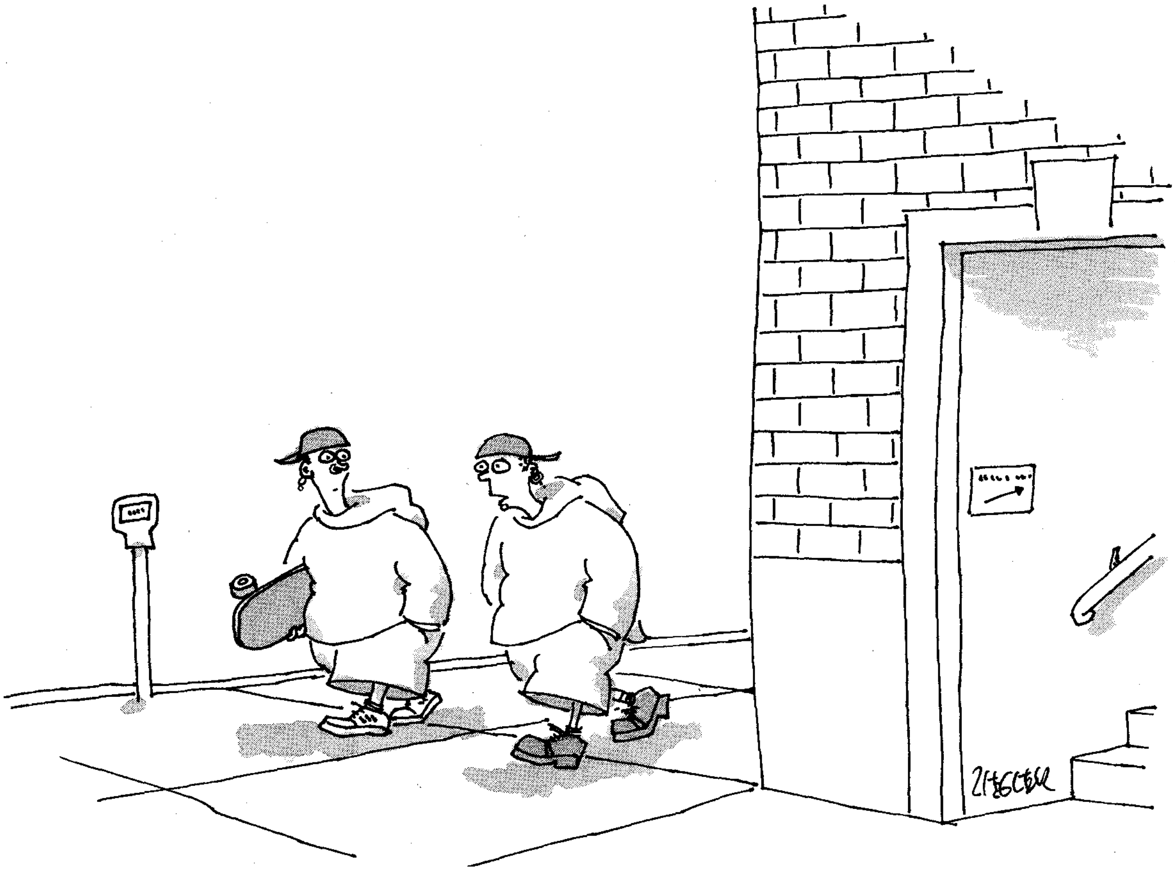
THE FUNNIES



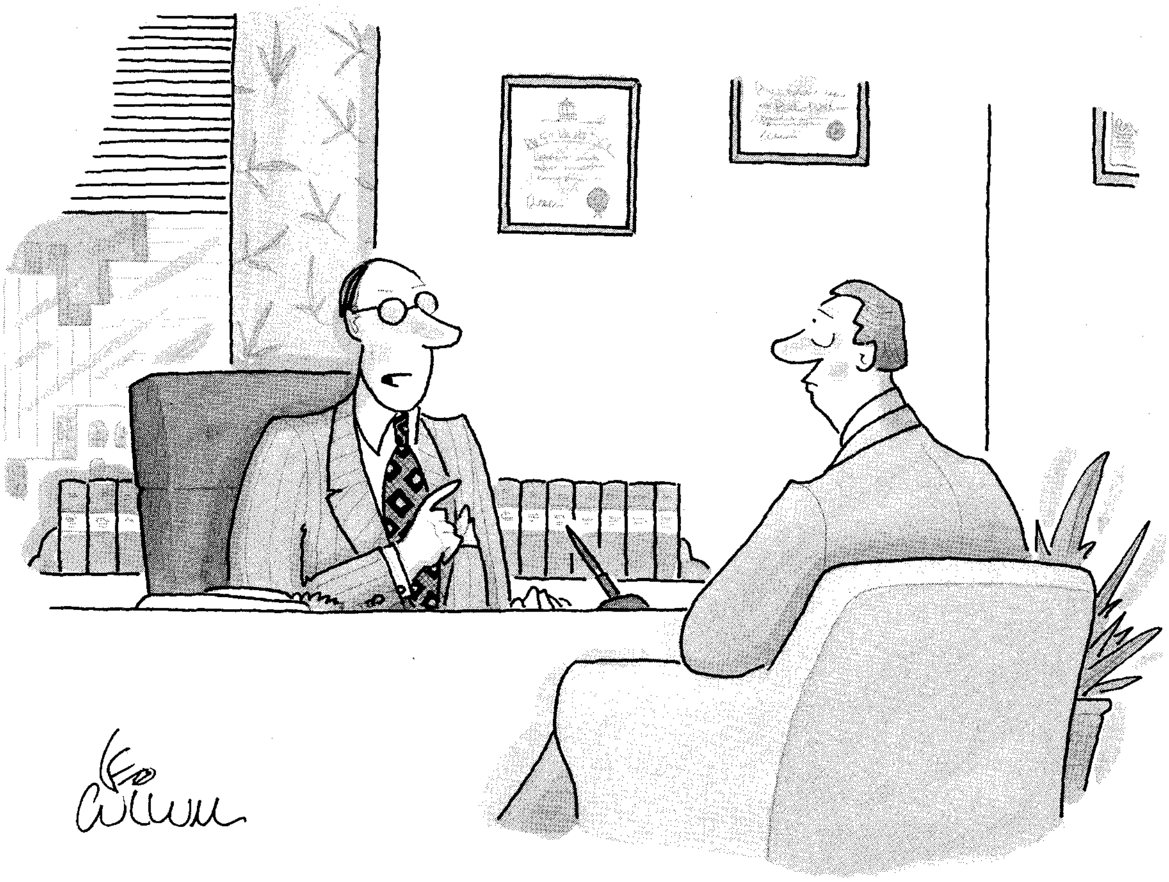
"Bond. James Bond."
"Hell. Go to hell."



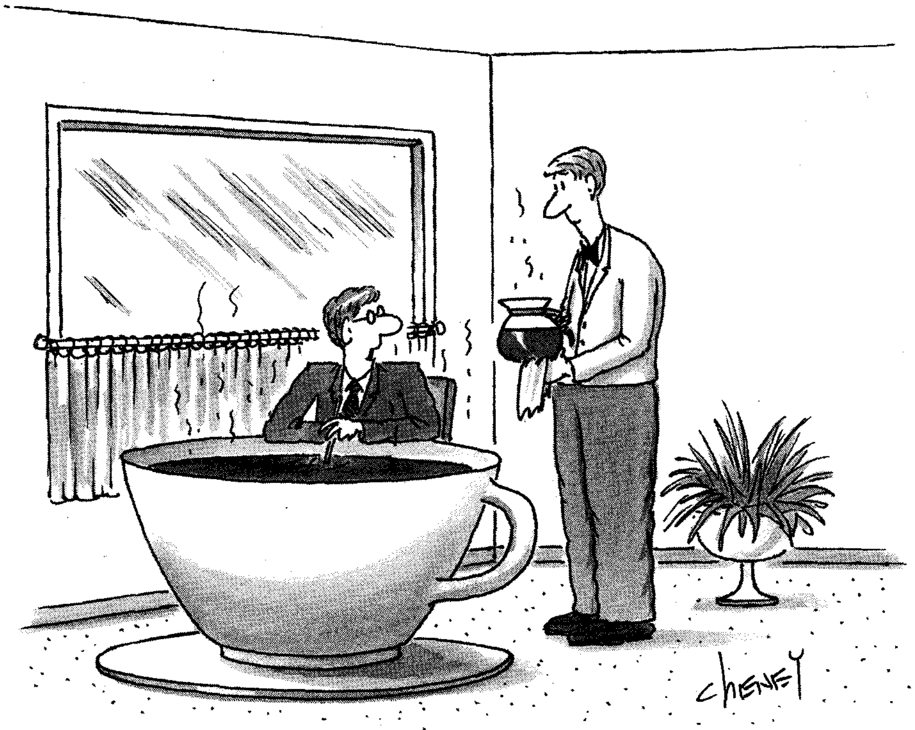
"This is your captain speaking."



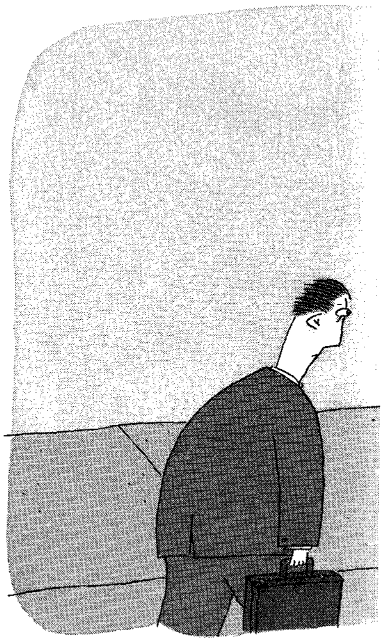
"My mom says that in twenty years we'll look back on our mode of dress and be amused by these clearly excellent choices. I think not."

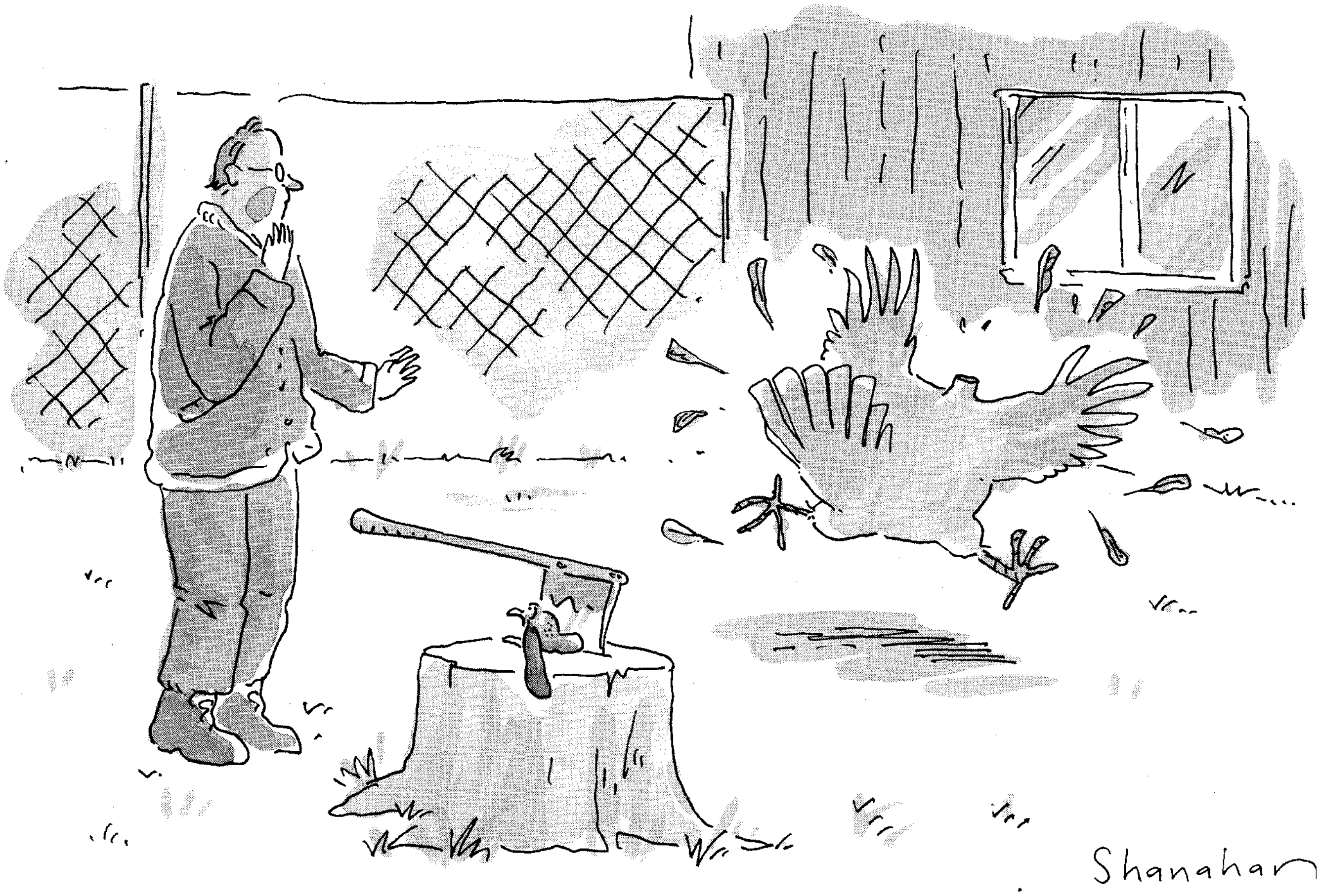


"I'm going to get you acquitted, but I want my fee to be a lesson to you."

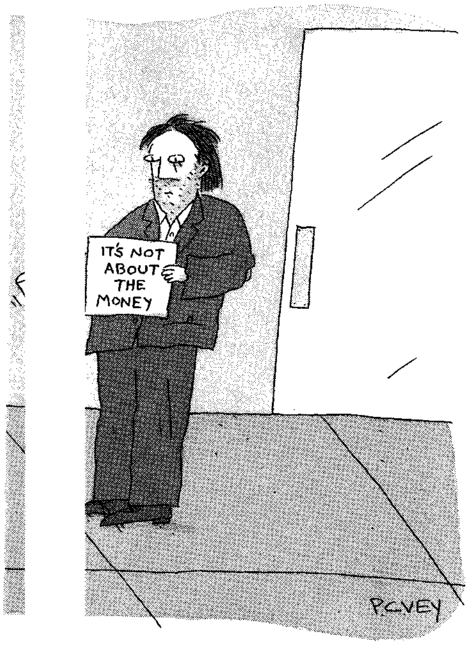


"No, thanks, I'm fine."





"What the hell did you expect?"



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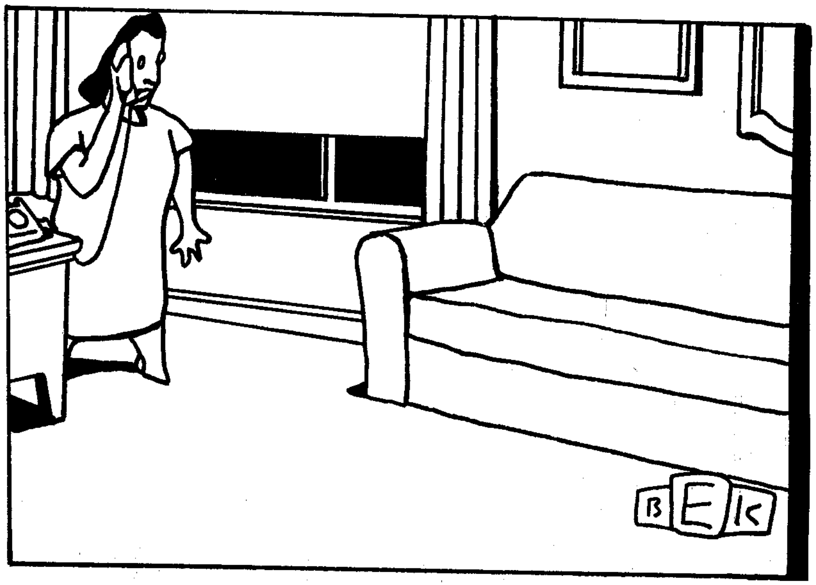
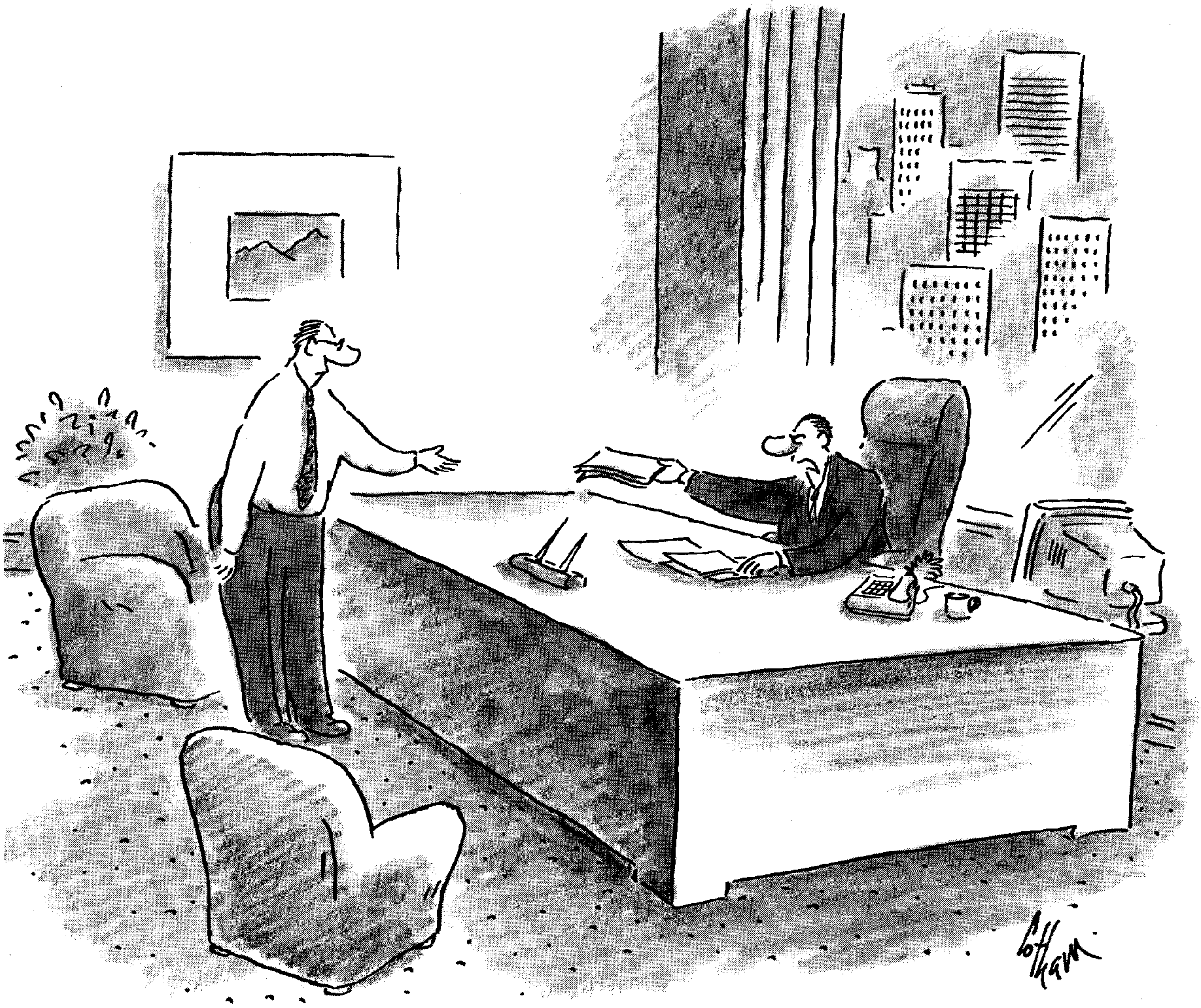
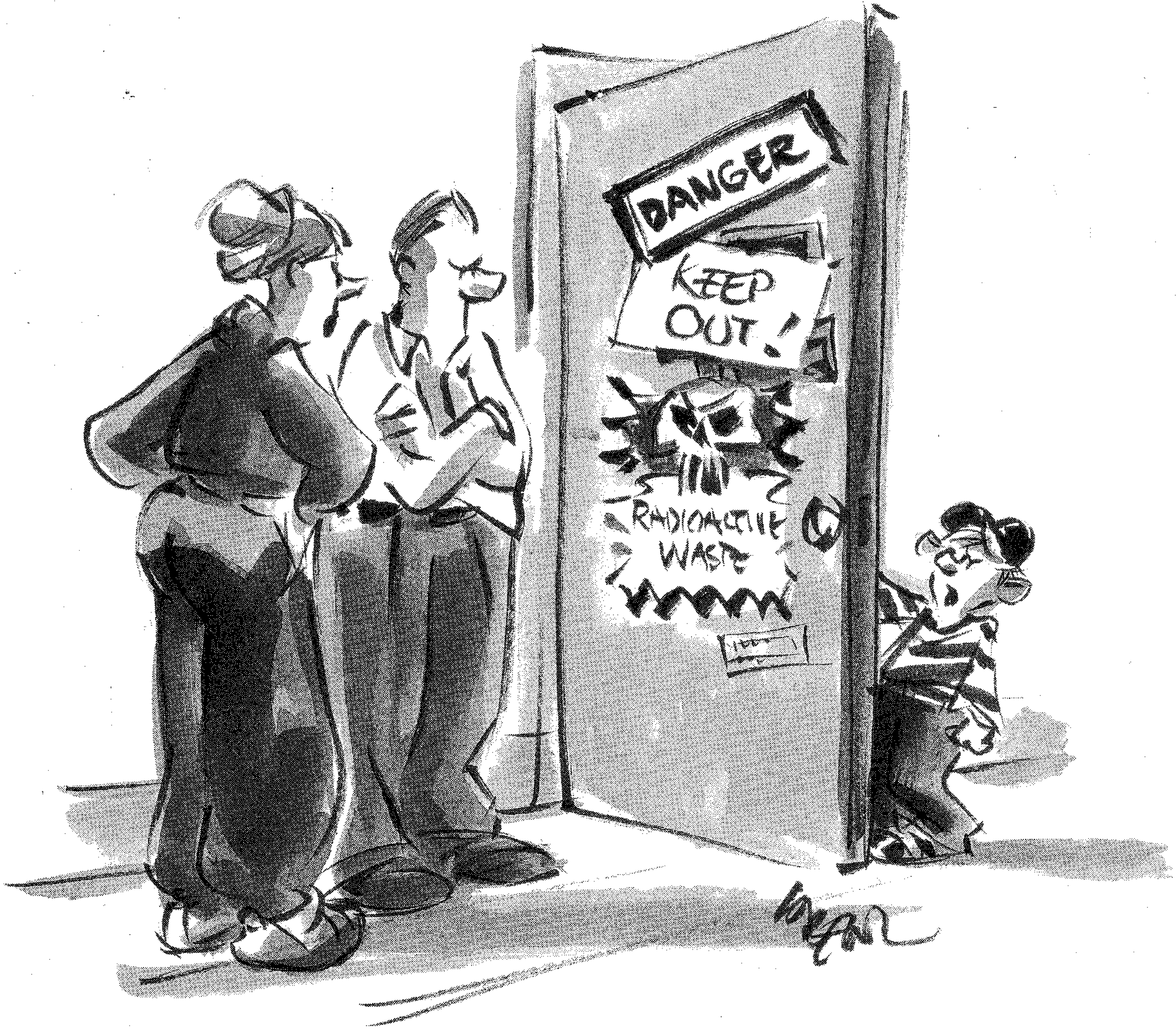
P.C. VEY



"I'm warning you—I'm going to call the police if you don't stop touching base with me."



"Run this up Legal's ass."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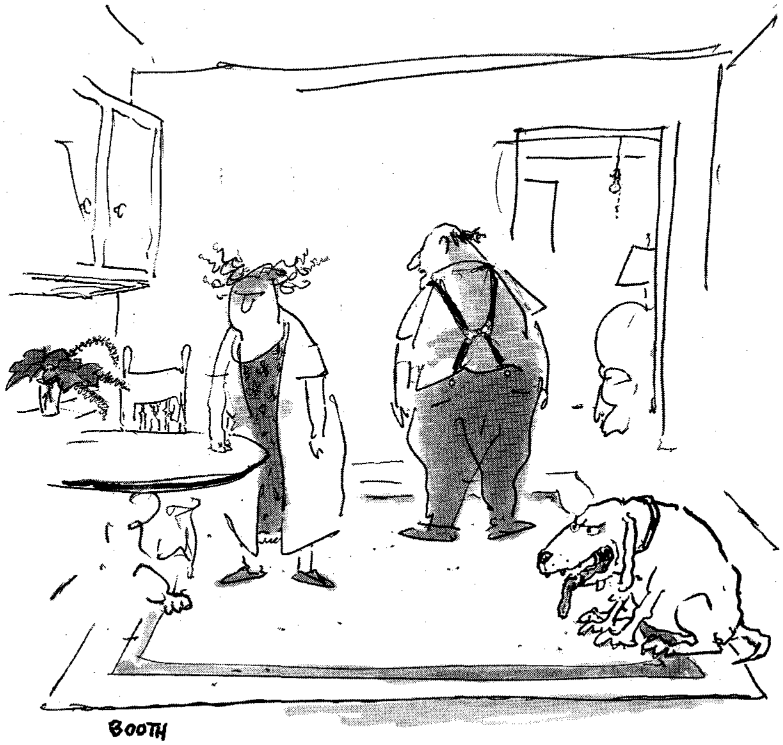
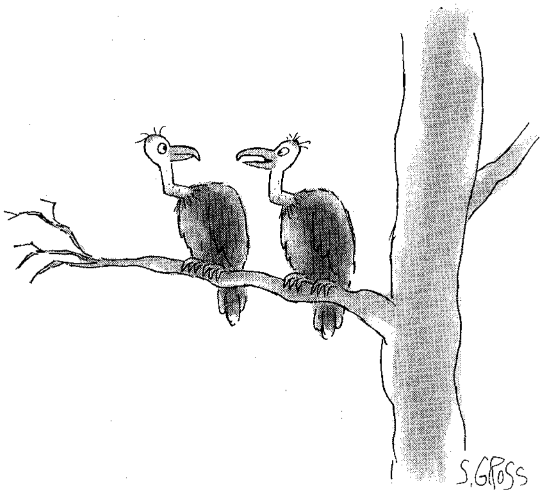
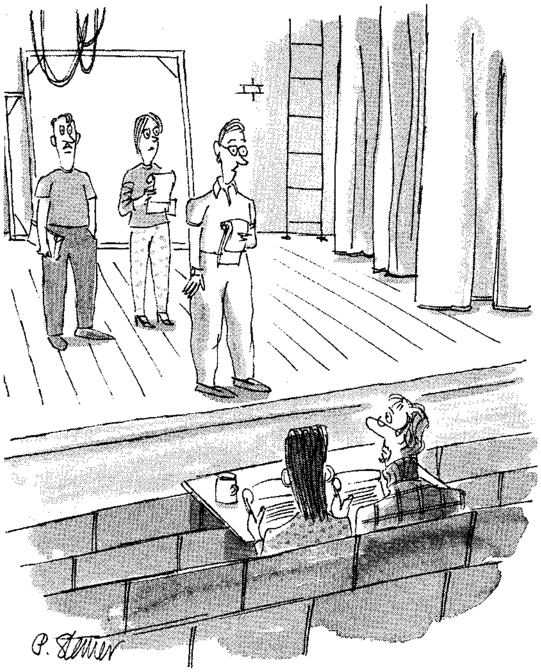
"If anyone cares, I'll be E-mailing Amnesty International."



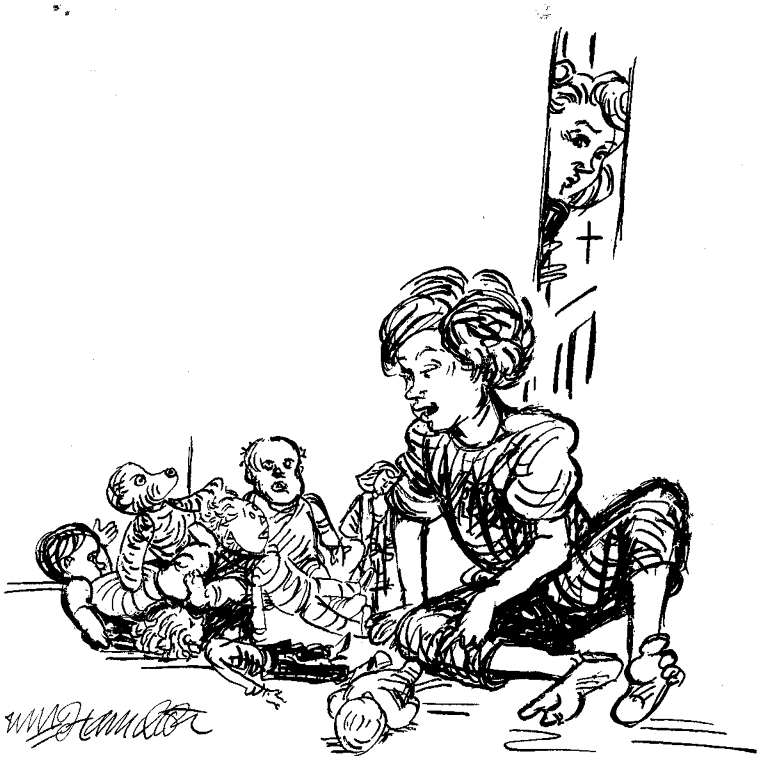
"What day of the week did we decide it was?"



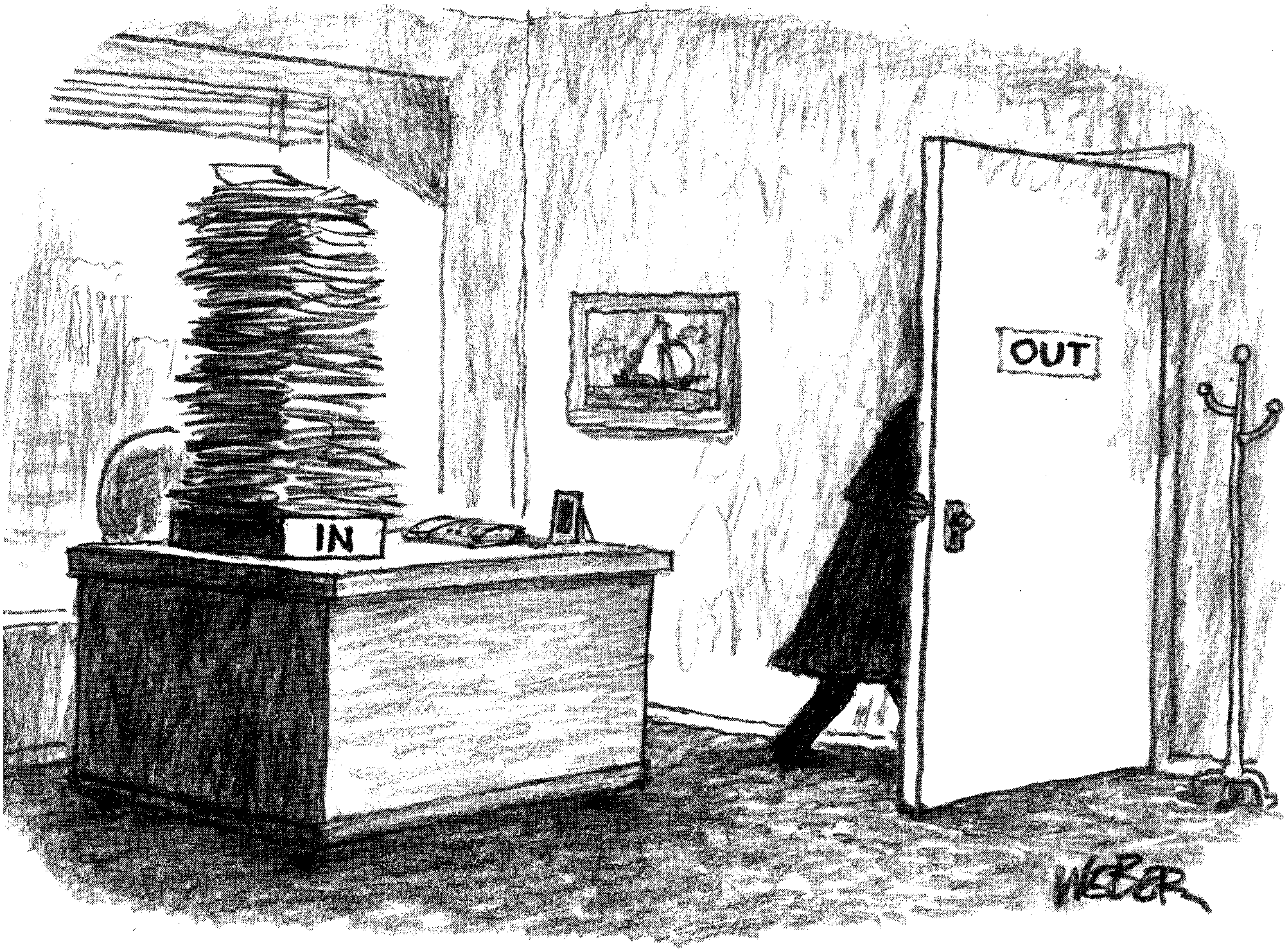
"Only two things are
certain—death and food."



"O.K., I just found my wife in bed with my best friend and I go into a rage. What's my motivation?"


Wm Hamilton

"And so, for the sake of the children, they lived together forever after."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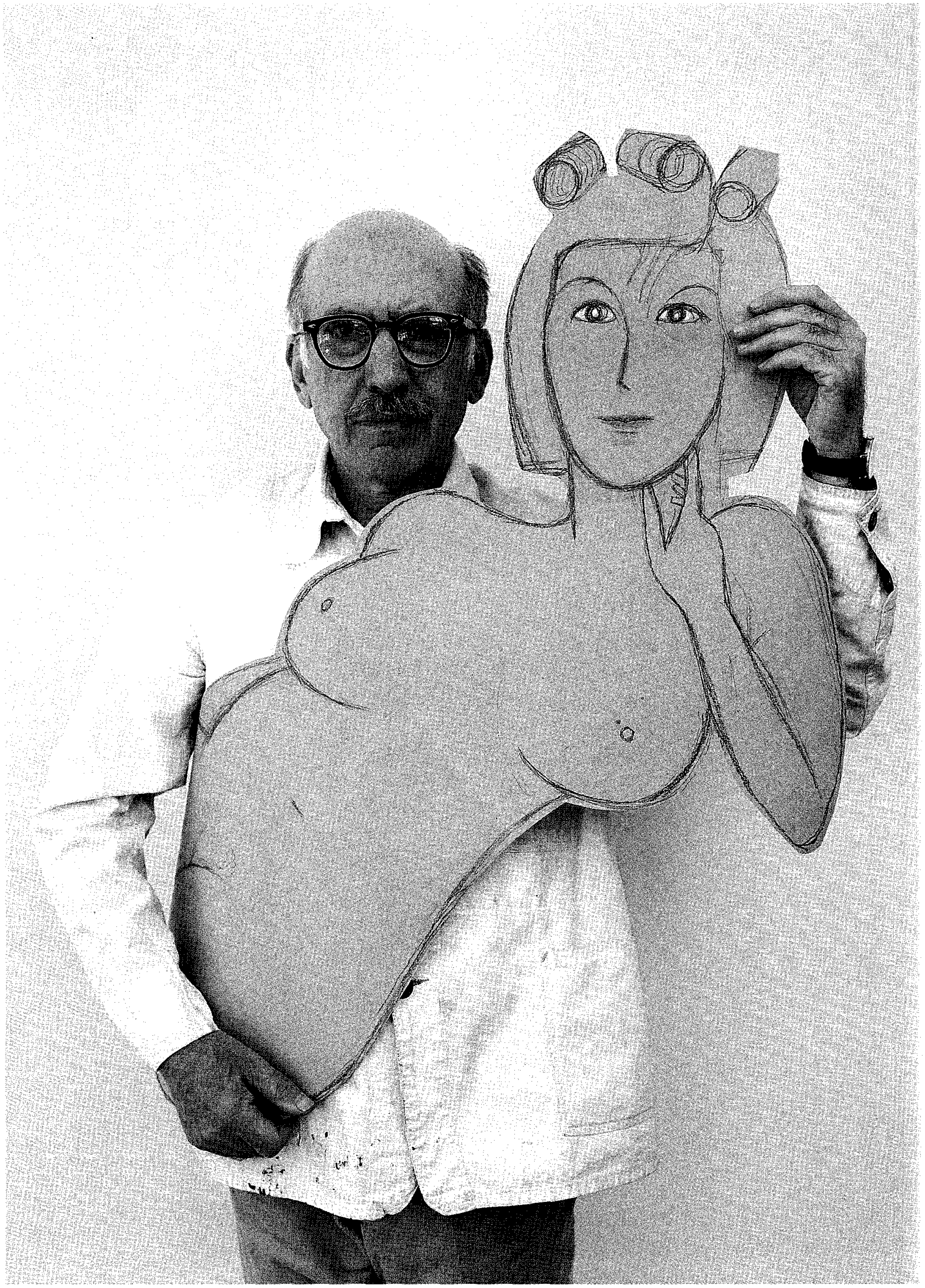


Saul Steinberg, despite his reputation as an ironist, was pained by the idea that his work was sly. Photograph by Evelyn Hofer

A CRITIC AT LARGE

WHAT STEINBERG SAW

The cartoonist and his America.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

From the start, American art has lived through artists who do not come from America and who do not make Art. From Audubon, the French bird painter who invented the American high style, through Sargent, the deal American painter who hardly ever ived here, to native outsiders like the reclusive, box-making Cornell and the department-store-window Warhol, the real original of American art has often come from far away and decided to doodle on the margins, rather than being drawn to the center. Half the ime, this oddball doodler turns out to be the one with second sight.

Of all these émigré visionaries, the most startling of our time was surely he cartoonist Saul Steinberg, who worked for this magazine for fifty years. Cartoonist? Well, no, not any more han Audubon was a bird-watcher, or Winslow Homer a magazine illustrator. ut Steinberg's origins were in carooning, and his abbreviated, thorny, pigrammatic style grew out of the mplifications of the cartoon; and the rtoonist's place, on the margins of art, as one he liked. Above all, the things rtoons do well—find neat, memoable metaphors for manners, make n Uncle Fester or an Uncle Sam—ere what he did well, too. Though e was proud to be in museums, he as uncomfortable in galleries, anxious collectors' homes. "All those drawgs, whimpering at night, unhappy in dopted houses," he said. He liked ages, and being in pages. He once ought of starting his own Xeroxed ne, as a way of breaking through the nventions of magazine publishing. We become our own widows," he said the defensive stasis that can overme an older artist.

We become our own widows. This is a oblem in writing about Steinberg. He sted so memorably as a person, a eaker and monologuist, that anyone who was lucky enough to know him knew him both as Saul and as Steinberg, the talker and the drawer. Saul is easy to write about: all you have to do is quote him. For five years, he and I worked together on a never-to-appear book of conversations, and I find my old disks littered with epigrams, aphorisms, odd digressions, and brilliant monologues. (His all-purpose interjection of skeptical amazement, "Ah, imagine!," still hisses in the ears of his friends.)

Steinberg, on the other hand, is hard to write about, because his work seems so entirely his own. All the little crevices and handholds that an art writer normally looks for when he climbs toward the summit of meaning—the school, the development, the rhetoric, the critical response—seem to be lacking. Steinberg hatched out whole, "the midget in the kindergarten," to use his own description of Marcel Duchamp.

Mesmerized by Saul, critics have missed the piece that he wrote about himself: the life's work of drawing that showed a man far sadder and wiser than the serene and epigrammatic talker. Although he had a reputation as an ironist, a theoretician, a meta-commentator, he was upset by the notion that his work was sly, or even subtle. He loved simplicity and straightforward statement more than anything else. (When the local tailor put up an apologetic sign saying not "Closed Due to Illness" but "I Am Sick," Saul beamed for weeks.) He was an artist for whom the word "sincere" was the highest tribute you could pay to another artist. "It looks like you" (or "sounds like you") was all his flattery. If he had a taste for masks, it was because they simplified faces. Nabokov once wrote a letter to him praising his work, and he seemed pained by it. It made him look tricky, like a "stylist"—like Nabokov—when he really wanted to find a place not among the magicians but among the people who still believe in magic.

The one big idea he actually liked was the discipline of Zen, and his ideal was what Zen masters call "beginner's mind," a state of naïve or unmediated sight. (He said once, "Zen is basically a form of davening, in the Hasidic spirit. In Saratoga, sometime in the nineteen-forties, I watched a colony of Hasidim come during the races, and I liked to watch them as they sat on those gargantuan porches of these old, nineteenth-century hotels. And all the Hasidim were rocking, davening on the rocking chairs, in synchronized motion, like the Rockettes at Radio City.")

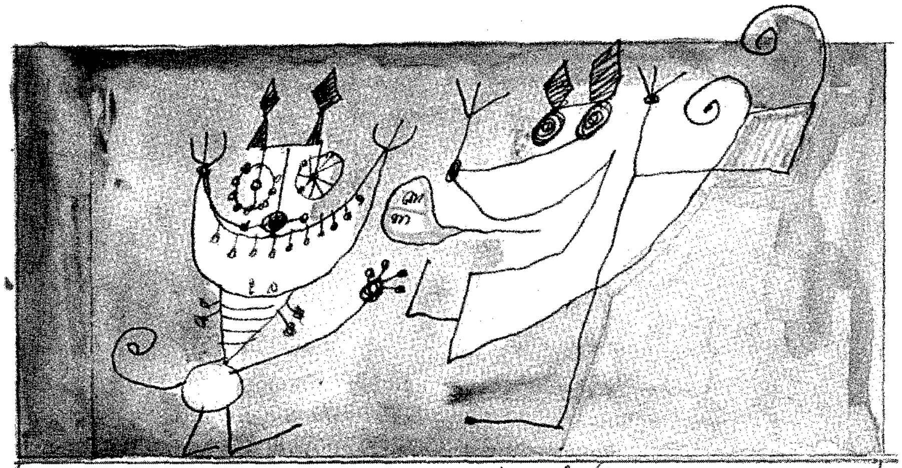
There was something almost "primitive" about his awe at coincidences of names, letters, sounds. Like many émigrés, he loved the alliterativeness of English. ("The phonetically reasonable is often the most reasonable of all," he once said.) It would please him, I think, that the letter "S" gathers around him like iron filings around a magnetic pole: he has been called a spy, a semiotician, a seer.

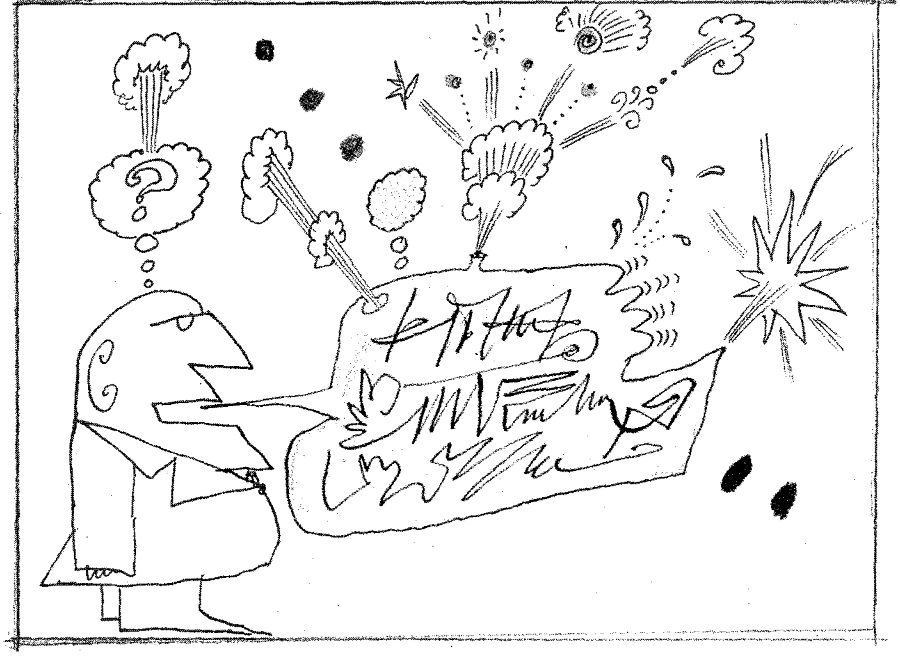
Original as he was, his work was far from being detached, self-referring, or self-enclosed. He did not make art, or cartoons, about art. He made pictures from life, passed through the prism of his mind. He looked at his time, and was of it. He was a poet-reporter, and he grew as poet-reporters grow, by seeing new things and finding new ways of showing them. More than any other artist, high or low, he recorded the great change that overcame New York between 1950 and 1975. He saw a culture of inhibition become a culture of sensation, a city of black-and-white deadpan become a city of deathly color, and he drew the two towns in two styles.

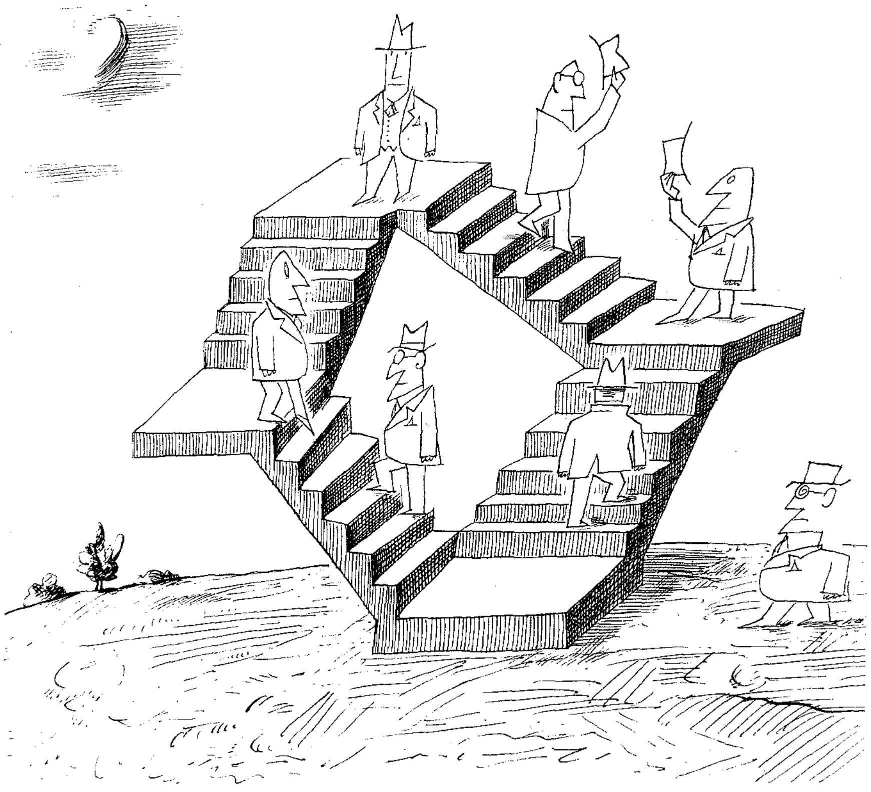
Saul Steinberg was born in a strange place, with a strange gift. The place was Romania as it emerged after the First World War, and the gift was for making funny drawings of the way things look in the mind. Romanian modernism was the context in which Steinberg first saw the world—the world of Brancusi, Cioran, Ionesco—and he took from it two things in particular. One was a tendency to see everything in quotation marks; the other was an unexcited attitude toward the overlap of caricature, cartooning, and the avant-garde. Romania gave him a sense both of the relativity of style and of the thinness of civilization. It sat on the edge of three civilizations—Gallic, Germanic, and Russian Orthodox—which meant that for a young Jew like Steinberg nothing seemed quite "natural." Everything looked tentative. The usual split between what's real and what's artificial didn't mean much to him. He was sincerely ironic, ironically sincere. Romania, he once said, was "an Art Deco world peopled by Byzantium man." (The idea of Byzantium, of a lost, layered, glittering corrupt civilization, haunted him.)

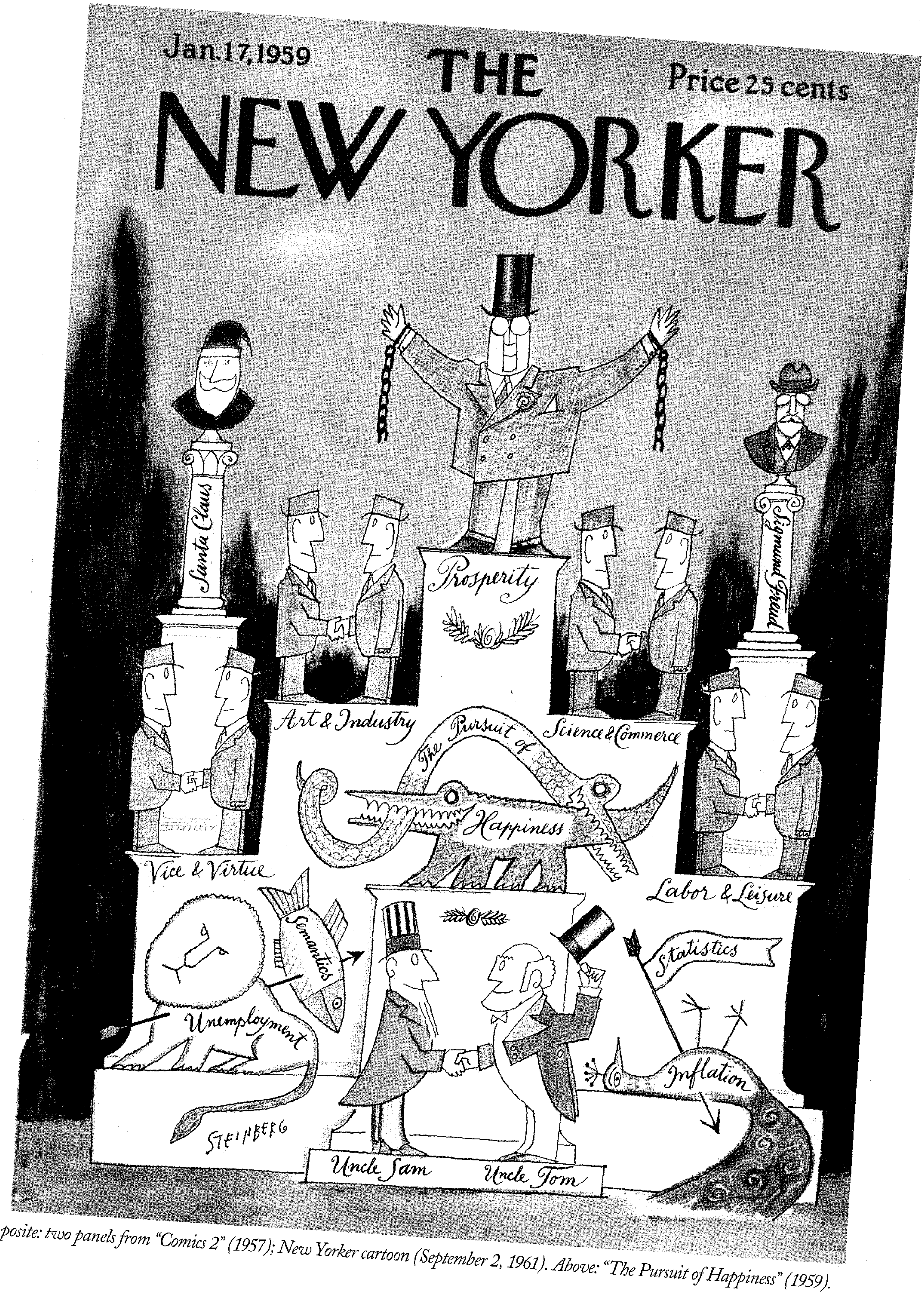
His gift was perfect for a place like Bucharest, where a lot of what he saw firsthand had to be understood as being seen secondhand. He saw metaphorically. He saw clichés as landscapes. Some of his most wonderful mature drawings have this form—the "YES" that whizzes gleefully toward an implacable "BUT," the cat crossing over the bridge from March to April, heading toward summer—but the important thing is that he didn't will these images into being. He couldn't walk on a beach without seeing the driftwood as books, waiting to be collected, couldn't look at a wicker chair without seeing it as a sexual organ. All his senses were minds. ("Eyes, nose, tongue, fingers, etc., in constant conversation and emotion. I suspect the eye and nose to be older than I am, and to have their own brains. They may be angels. I find that one reliable instrument is the nose. I go back to the house where I lived as a child, at night, and try to sniff a past. I allow the nasal emotions to tell me the truth. I discover myself as a house. In the bedroom and living room are my best friends and relatives—the Senses.")

It was natural, in the twentieth century, for an artist with a gift for metaphor to be torn between the avant-garde and the cartoon. In Romania, this choice was particularly fraught, because most of the modern art that got made was made in magazines—there

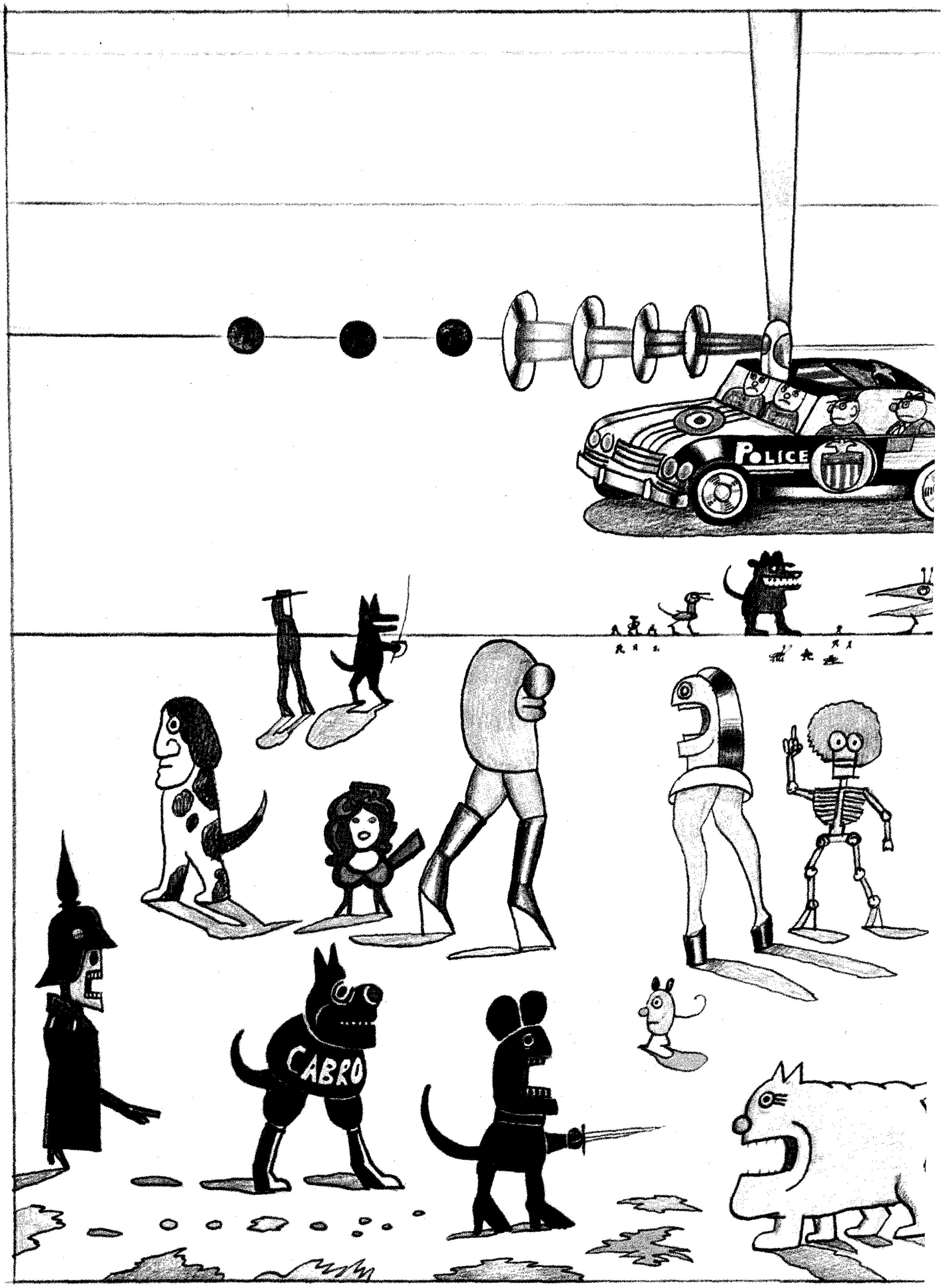




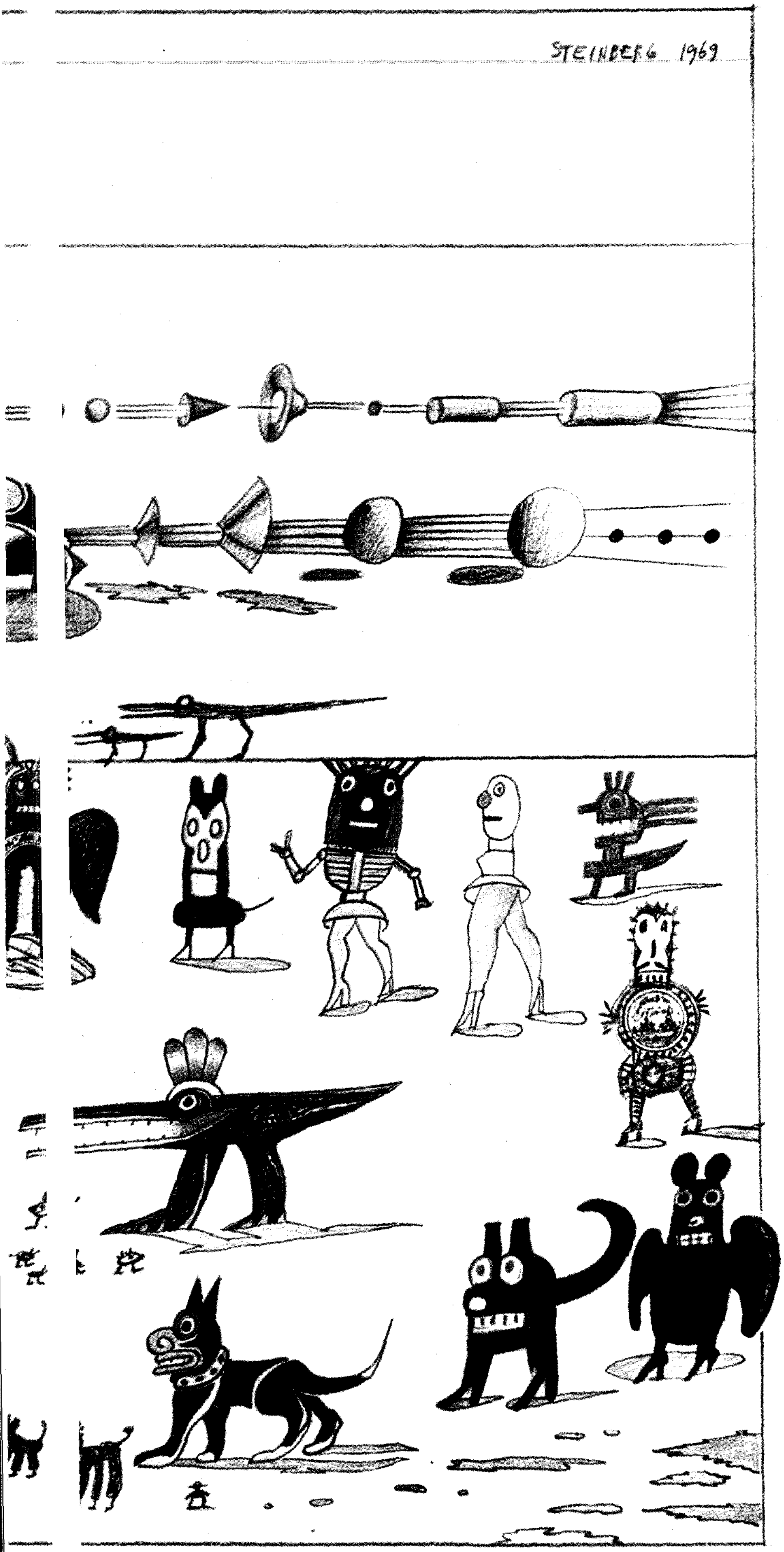



Jan.17,1959
THE NEW YORKER
Price 25 cents
Santa Claus
Sigmund Freud
Prosperity
Art & Industry
The Pursuit of Happiness
Science & Commerce
Vice & Virtue
Labor & Leisure
Semantics
Statistics
Unemployment
Inflation
STEINBERG
Uncle Sam
Uncle Tom

posite: two panels from "Comics 2" (1957); New Yorker cartoon (September 2, 1961). Above: "The Pursuit of Happiness" (1959).


POLICE
CABRO

“Bleecker Street” (1969). Steinberg recorded the change that overcame New York between 1950 and 1975, as a culture of inh



becam culture of sensation, and he drew the two cities in two styles.

were no galleries or dealers to support young artists. This meant that the line between magazine doodling and fine-art drawing was much more permeable than in other capitals. Brancusi himself did a lot of animal cartoons that, in their spiky insouciance, look almost like grownup Steinbergs.

Although he came from a Jewish family, he was not observant, but he had a sense of Jews as a people made to wander. ("Ah, you have decided not to forgo the essential Jewish experience of emigration and expatriation," he said, when my wife and I told him we were leaving New York to live in France.) Not that it took any special urge to push a Jew out of Romania in the mid-thirties, when a poisonous local brew of injured national feeling and vitalist fascist doctrine was stirring in Bucharest. Steinberg left for Milan, and Italy remained for him if not an ideal then at least a serious, dignified country. (In Milan, he studied architecture: "What did you learn when you were an architect?" "When the eraser falls from the table, wait for it to stop bouncing before you pick it up.") There, and on trips to Paris, he also absorbed French Surrealism, whose theatrics repelled him, but whose purposeful mingling of things seen and things dreamed attracted him. Throughout his life, he shared the basic Surrealist program—to draw pictures of the life of the mind as it takes place.

When the war came, he left Italy for the United States, where he was turned away at Ellis Island and sent to Santo Domingo. From there he submitted drawings to *The New Yorker*, and eventually, with the help of Harold Ross, he got an entry visa into the United States. Almost as soon as he arrived in New York, he enlisted in the Navy and was shipped out to India and, later, China. Steinberg's work from the forties is lurid in a way that it would never be again: a hideous Goebbels plugging in to a wall socket to light up his own medals; crooked ruined streets in Italy and Germany. (One moment in the forties found him working on a mural project in Cincinnati, alongside the expatriate Miró, whom he encouraged to submit cover art to *The New Yorker*. Easy money, and a road not taken.)

By 1942, Steinberg was confident

in his work for the magazine, and he took America as a subject. He made a tour of the major battlefields of the Civil War—Shiloh, Fredericksburg, Vicksburg, and so on. ("Everyone must undertake these visits to understand America. The memorials are basically Pop art—monuments made of bronze, all modelled after photographs. Heroes, soldiers, the folds in their clothes, buttons, weapons, all done with gravity. All these things are basically baby shoes, bronzed. . . . Vicksburg provides a sense of tragedy, because of what we think, at first, is the sound of the river, nearby. We look, and we discover that it is traffic across the metal bridges—still a noble, elegiac sound, cars going ninety miles per hour on a highway, heard from a distance.")

It wasn't the energy but the exceptional sobriety of America that impressed him. He was touched by the mournful continuities of American life. He saw that ours was a country no more "innocent" than any other—all that blood, all those battles, all those bronzed shoes—but that it remained in most ways honest. America was a country of inhibitions that still ran on trust, and, not having suffered the true disruptions of the twentieth century—what Steinberg called the "horror world"—it remained connected to its own pre-First World War history and emblems in a way that Europe did not. He loved American deadpan: the cigar-store Indian, the baseball, the Civil War cemetery, the D.A.R. cannon, the courthouse steps, Santa Claus and Buffalo Bill, the Thanksgiving turkey, the dollar bill. ("American money for me was very important. What artist are we reminded of when we look at money, who would we trust to paint money? I'm trying to think. No abstract artist. Well, Matisse would make good money, comic money, looking like fake money. Do you know who would have loved American money, who we could put in charge of the mint? Van Gogh—an ecstatic man who loved engraving.") It was the one country where Latin—"E Pluribus Unum," "Lex et Justitia"—still mattered. He saw, too, that what American wealth made of European style was also sincere. The International Style buildings on Park Avenue that fill his work of the fifties—as scored music paper, as tall cabinets—wear invisible stiff collars and spats. And so much space! There are no more haunting images of America in the fifties than Steinberg's, with their spindly black lines and long white spaces, their whistling recessions down Main Street and along the newly modernized Park Avenue.

The Post Office, above all. Post offices, in profile, in angle, in caricature, fill his drawings, for he saw that the Post Office was to America what the village church is to England, what the Mairie is to France: the small institution that sums up the local faith. It is faith not in the state but in the magically efficient functioning of prosperity, the faith Americans still have that telephones and televisions and Federal Express will all just work, as if by right. (He was stunned once to see a cop ticketing a FedEx truck. The act itself seemed illegal.) Where other émigré artists at large in fifties America went looking for weirdness, Steinberg saw that the weirdest thing about America was its normalcy, the sense people had that life was meant to work out. You could not invoke, say, Queen Victoria in England without guilt or nostalgia or irony. But America stacked its totems on totem poles, and thought that they could still be worshipped.

Our patriotism was simple, and the most unlikely things—Dada, psychoanalysis—could be gathered into it. Steinberg's greatest drawing of this time, from 1959, is called "The Pursuit of Happiness": an imaginary Beaux-Arts monument where Prosperity, a businessman sprung free from the shackles of the Depression, stands alongside Freud and Santa Claus, presiding over a host of lesser gods. Art shakes hands with Industry, Science with Commerce, Vice with Virtue, and Labor with Leisure, all resembling the same sharp-nosed besuited organization man. Semantics (a fish) skewers Unemployment (a lion), and the arrow of Statistics slays the peacock of Inflation. It is the image of mid-century wealth, and, while it certainly has a satiric force—"The Pursuit" and "of Happiness" are two crocodiles, biting each other's tail—it is quietly admiring, too. Who could have imagined that Santa and Sigmund would preside together over so serene a monument? Steinberg recognized that it was a kind of dam, meant to hold back disorder, and the odd thing was that it did.

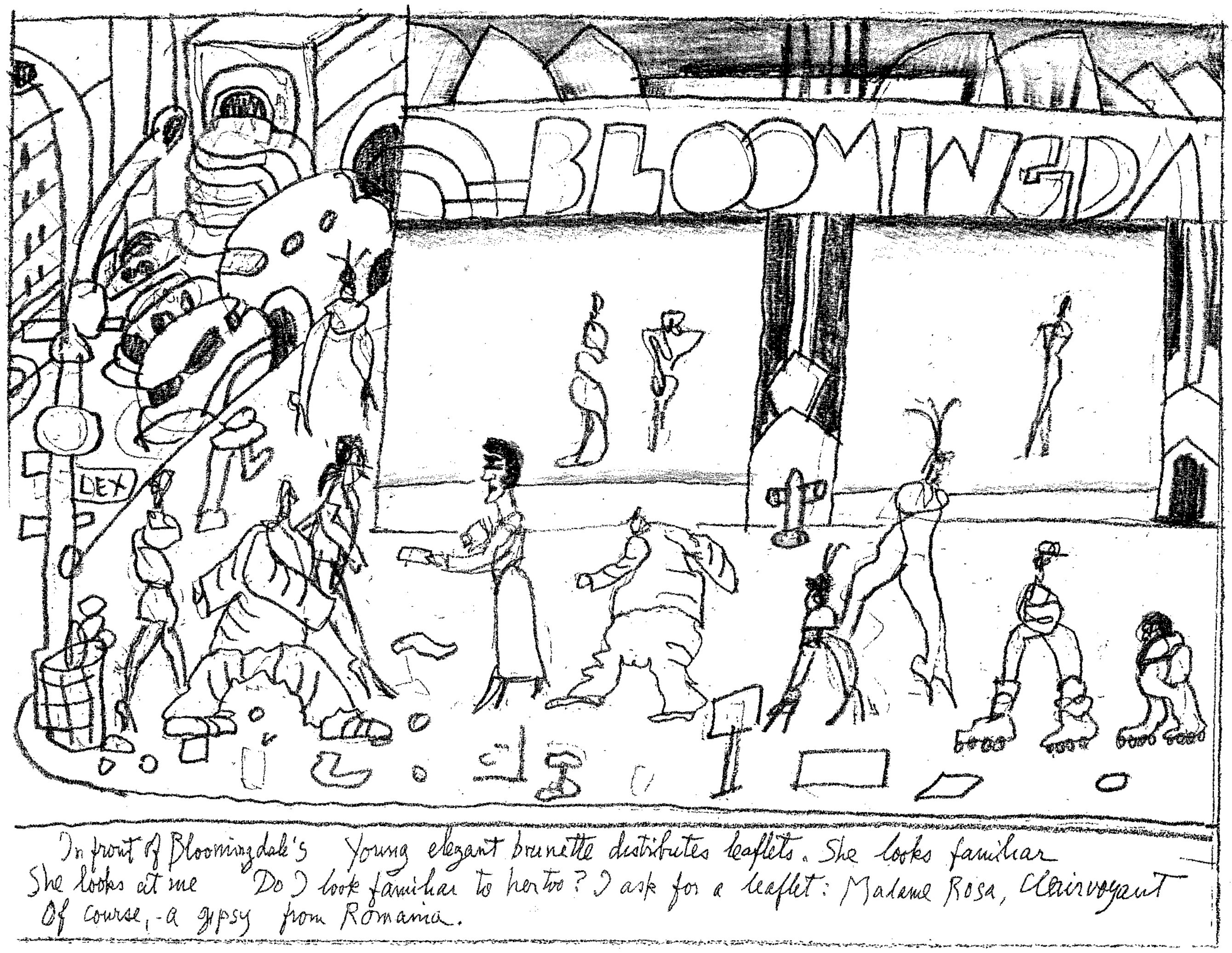
And then, in the nineteen-sixties, something happened. The world became as strange as Steinberg's own mental landscape. Steinberg, nimbly hovering over the fault line, saw the break take place. A major divide in twentieth-century art is between those who got the fifties and couldn't get the sixties and those who got both. There are writers who got both—Updike, Roth, and Mailer all did, in different ways—but there are not many artists, and this is because Pop art emerged to form a barricade. You had to take sides. Steinberg, disguised as a cartoonist in a magazine, was easily able to go back and forth; in the late sixties, he had a studio on Union Square West, in the same building as Warhol's Factory. (He called him Andy, and admired his cows.) Perhaps because he had been flooded out of his home before, he was also able to see that the dam had truly broken. His sad, spindly black-and-white cities became gross and high-colored. He began to make street scenes of New York life: prostitutes as pure legs, muggers as armed Mickey Mice, Krazy Kats advancing with stilettos. Even his own Upper East Side neighborhood, which had once been avenues of solitude, became crammed with checkerboards, rumbling down the boulevards like tanks. He had grasped that the postwar bulwark culture was peculiar not because of its abundance, its washing machines and its advertisements, but because of its solemn attachment to the American past. He now grasped that the amazing thing about the tabloid Babylon that seemed to be taking its place was that it was full of delirious comic-book violence, which still hurt. He had been the Beerbohm of the Eisenhower era; he became the Bosch of the age of Nixon.

In the images from the seventies, Steinberg found himself in a quieter role, as a surreptitious Surrealist, someone who could play "the monstrous music of the mind" in harmony with a monstrous music already playing on the local jukebox. At no other time in his career did he come up with more symbolic images than he did in the seventies: the cop as armed skeleton, the Chrysler Building as spiked Golgotha; the American woman as crazed majorette and the American man as mad bellhop, absurdity and goonery overlayered.

Though Steinberg never stopped working, after 1980 he became extremely self-conscious about what he would publish and what he wouldn't. Some of this was just vanity, but most f it was real, and was a response to his me. He had drawn America safe and merica scary, and he had no real re-onse, no picture language, for an merica that was neither all that safe r all that scary, but just rich and ppy. He retreated. And in his retreat began to make a series of delibately crude pencil drawings—"Ex tos," he called them—commemoting vital moments in his life, small iphanies that looked like blessings. these drawings, Saul became a subt for Steinberg. Some showed moents on the New York sidewalk, as when he allowed the homeless man on his street to break a dollar and give him only two quarters, for the parking meter. One showed a moment when, listening to a recording of "Così Fan Tutte" on the car radio outside Boston, he lost the signal, and drove back toward town, toward Mozart. Another showed his parents, after he brought them to America, in a state of bewilderment and shock—until they saw Gary Cooper in a movie, and breathed easy. Him they knew from Romania, an old friend. These "Ex Votos" have been published only sporadically, but I suspect that when they are collected they will be his last, bittersweet masterpiece.

In the end, the war of interpretation about what Saul Steinberg's work means might be seen as a battle between "B"s and "S"s—a pitched battle of initial letters, which he could have drawn himself. Better, the "B"s think, to see him not outside art or cartooning, as seer or semiotician or spy, but within it, in a tradition of eccentric draftsmen, not just Beerbohm and Bosch but even a little Blake, too; like Blake, he worked alone, made drawings, and drew his time in his own images.

"Ah, imagine!" I hear Saul say, politely but skeptically, to all these games and labels, all this "interpretation." "Ah, imagine!" was his all-purpose doubtful-polite-delighted interjection. But perhaps there's another, more Blakean way to take that ghostly call. Saul could at times be barbed and thorny, but in Steinberg's work, as in Blake's, the thorns and barbs of life became boundaries and clear outlines, putting strange and definite shapes around a place and time. So the dapper, skeptical "Ah, imagine!" of Saul becomes a simpler, almost childlike injunction in the work of Steinberg: Ah. Imagine. ◆



In front of Bloomingdale's Young elegant brunette distributes leaflets. She looks familiar
She looks at me Do I look familiar to her too? I ask for a leaflet: Madame Rosa, Clairvoyant
Of course, - a gypsy from Romania.

otebook sketch (1994). After 1980, Steinberg made a series of crude pencil drawings commemorating vital moments in his life.

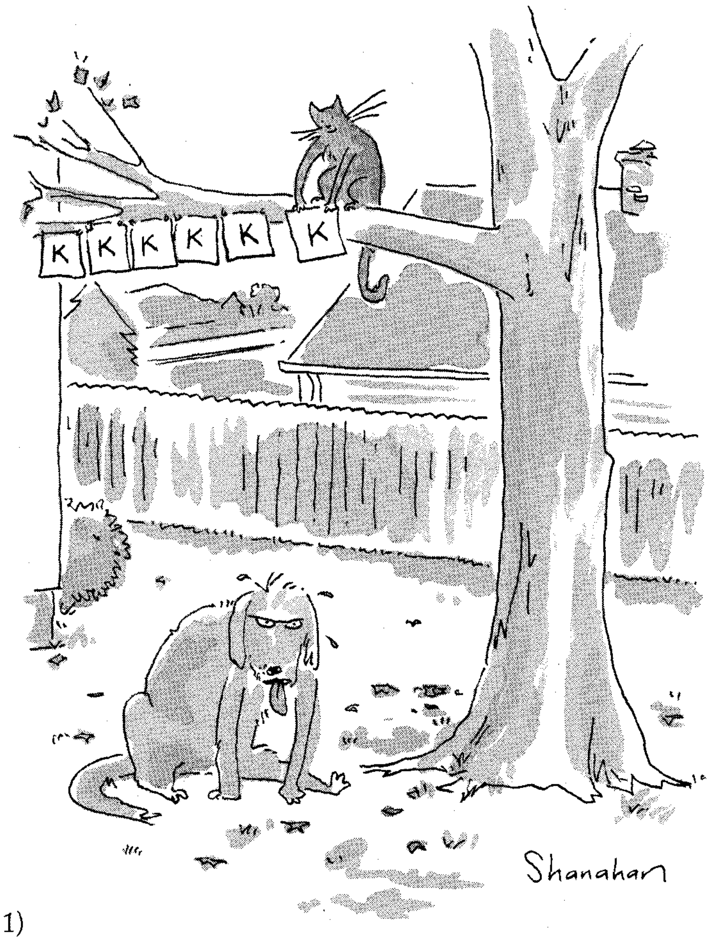
THE CARTOON I.Q. TEST

I DON'T GET IT!

O.K., we'll admit it: many of you read the cartoons first. Please don't feel ashamed of this, as if you were eating dessert before dinner. Think of it more as a sorbet: between a long, complicated workday and some long, complicated pieces of prose, you want something light, to cleanse the palate.

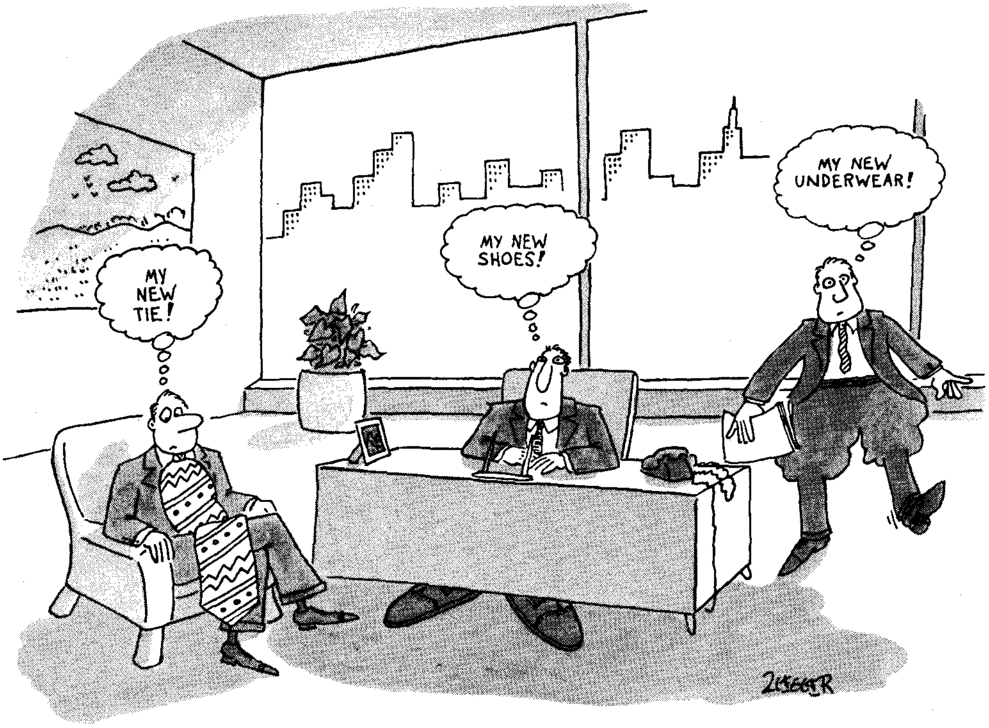
But perhaps this explains why readers become so upset when we publish a cartoon that appears, even on repeated reading, to make no sense whatsoever. When you finally get home and pick up your *New Yorker*, at least, for the love of God, the cartoons should be intelligible.

We hear you. And so we've taken it upon ourselves to explain five stumpers that many readers have puzzled over. For each cartoon, we've provided four explanations, three of them fake. Can you guess which is correct?

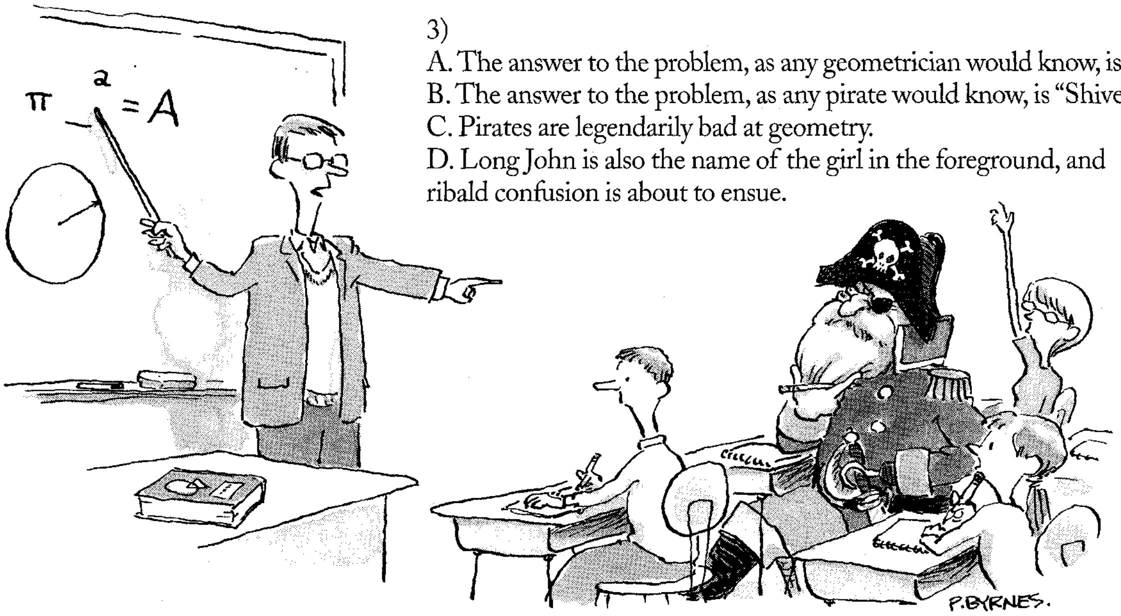


1)
A. The cat believes that "cat" starts with "K," despite the dog's efforts to convince him otherwise.
B. Dogs are from Mars, cats are from Venus.
C. The dog is a paranoid schizophrenic, and the cat is obsessive-compulsively fixated on the letter "K"; they have just been released from a mental institution for pets.
D. The cat hangs a "K," for "strikeout," each time the dog takes an unsuccessful swipe at him.

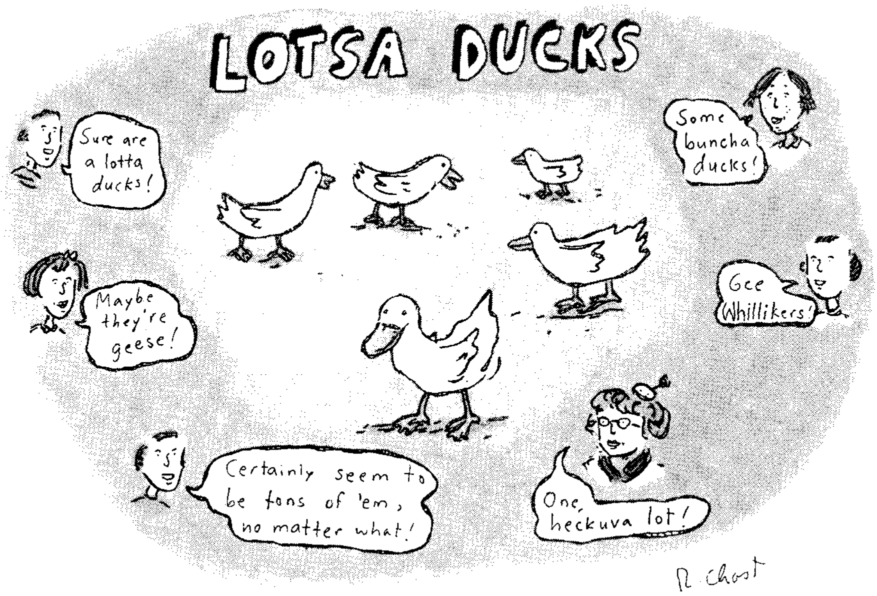
2)
A. Far from being ignorant of fashion, today's businessman is obsessed with his clothes.
B. Each man is preoccupied with his new item of clothing—a preoccupation represented by the item's size.
C. Three co-workers were lured to a sale at the Really Big & Tall Men's Shop.
D. Three co-workers are trying to get their minds off their dot-com's imminent demise.


MY NEW TIE!
MY NEW SHOES!
MY NEW UNDERWEAR!
ZIEGLER

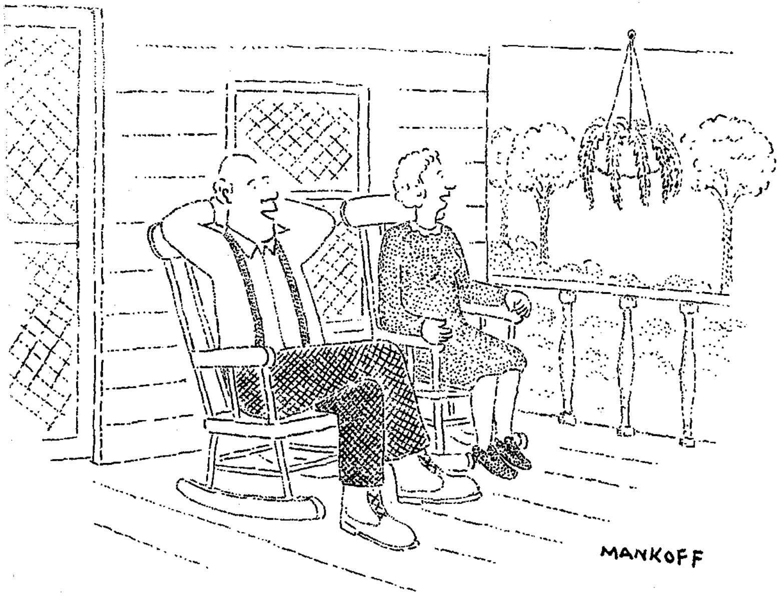
3)
A. The answer to the problem, as any geometrician would know, is “r” (or “Arrrr!”).
B. The answer to the problem, as any pirate would know, is “Shiver me timbers!”
C. Pirates are legendarily bad at geometry.
D. Long John is also the name of the girl in the foreground, and ribald confusion is about to ensue.


π ² = A
P. BYRNES.

“Pi what squared? Long John, you should be able to get this.”


LOTSA DUCKS
Sure are a lotta ducks!
Some buncha ducks!
Maybe they're geese!
Gee Whillikers!
Certainly seem to be tons of 'em, no matter what!
One heckuva lot!
R. Chast

4)
A. While it might not seem that ive ducks are a lot, that's four more han you need.
3. The real title, “Who Let he Ducks Out?,” was considered too ilarious for its time.
C. Because there are more people in the artoon than ducks, it satirizes nthrocentrism.
D. That there are any ducks t all in this drawing is funny.

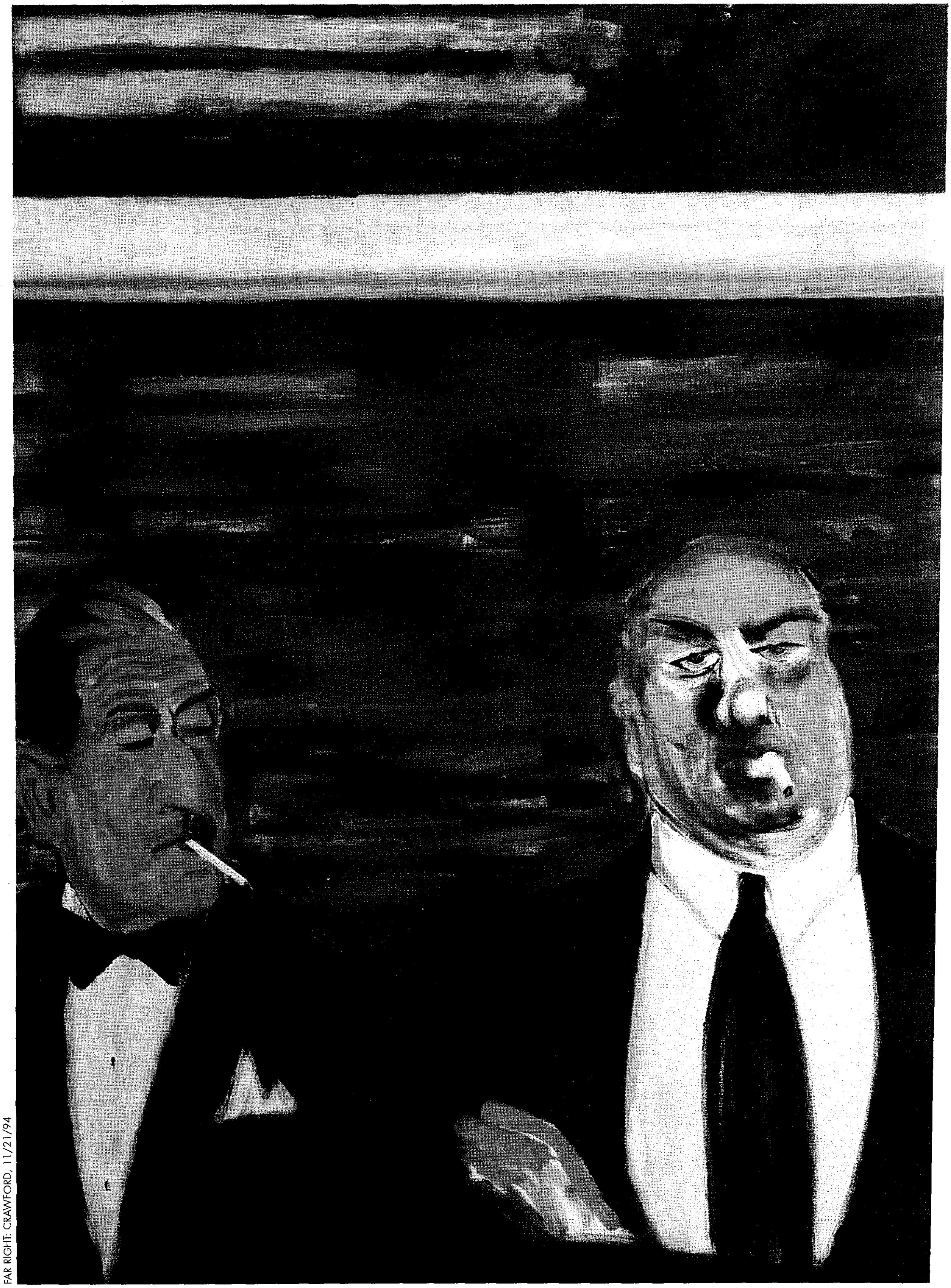


“This is the life, eh?”

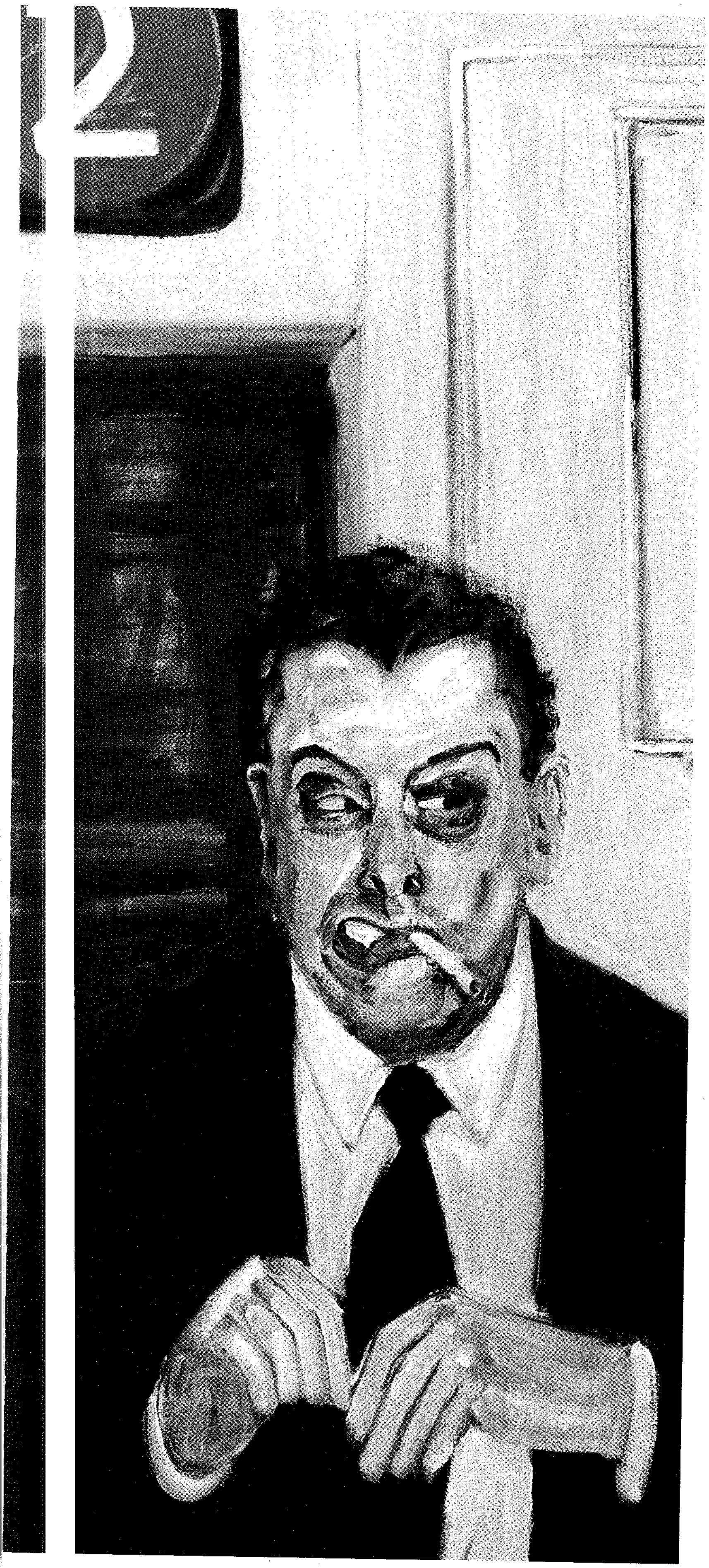
5)
A. The objects in the background, which seem to be trees, are actually nuclear mushroom clouds, and the couple will soon be vaporized.
B. The tiny dots that seem to be the woman's dress and the man's suspenders are a terrible, fatal rash.
C. A crucial element is missing; namely, the second part of the caption, in which the woman says “No,” and which was supposed to be added in production.
D. A crucial element is missing; namely, humor, which the cartoonist had hoped would be added in production.

The answers: (1) D, (2) B, (3) A, (4) A, (5) C.

BYRNES 5/15/00; CHAST 2/18/99; MANKOFF 5/11/97



FAR RIGHT: CRAWFORD, 11/21/94



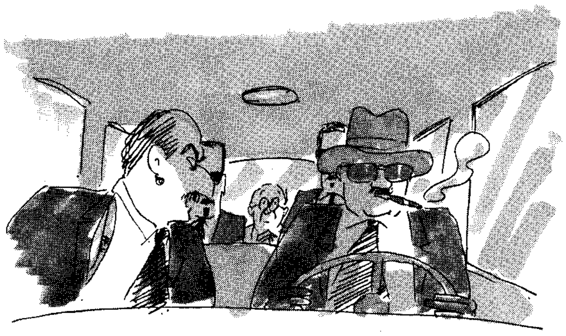
EASEL

MICHAEL'S MOB

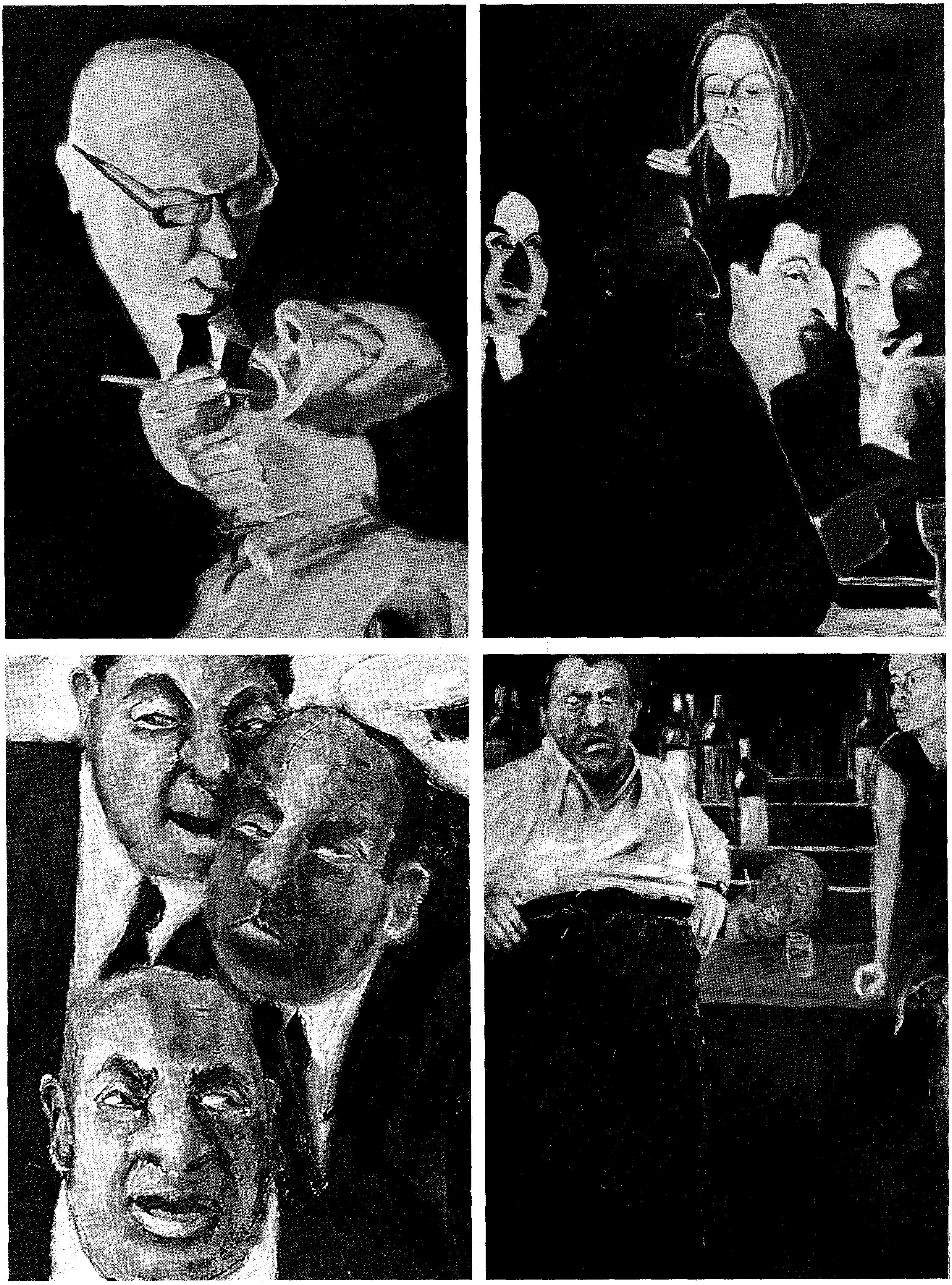
During the six years that Michael Crawford's cartoons about Mob life, and Mob-induced death, have been appearing in these pages, Crawford has also been producing dozens of large paintings of mobsters in their more private moments. In the cartoons, the artist is in the safe position of eavesdropper; in the paintings, he is a voyeur intent on penetrating dangerous nocturnal places he hasn't been invited to, and the sense of menace is both more frightening and more absurdly comic. In this underworld, Crawford says, "there is no irritation so minor that it can't be dealt with by the most terrifying, extreme means—there's no end of humor in the conceit."

Crawford's work has drawn upon images from film noir, but his paintings have more venerable sources as well. Often, the groupings of figures, and the deep, dark space behind them, echo the compositions of Dutch and pre-Coppola Italian masters: one painting of a bunch of beefy baddies, "Supper at Emma's," tips its fedora straight at Caravaggio's "Supper at Emmaus." Still, Crawford's artistic marriage to the Mob is not a blind romance; a few years ago, he attended the trial of Vincent (the Chin) Gigante and was struck by how dull it was. "Seductive mythical world? Forget it!"

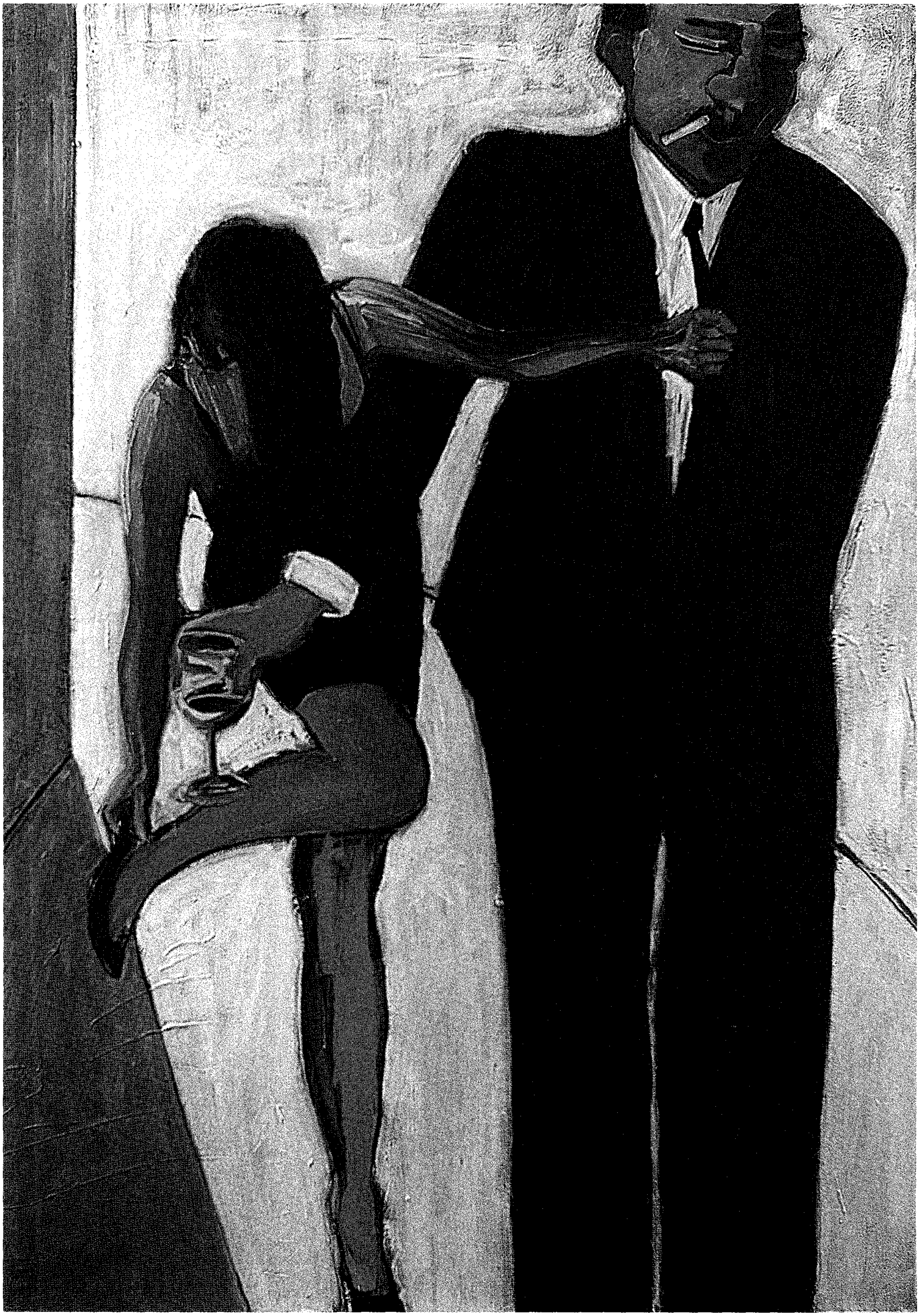
—*Nancy Franklin*



"It's pretty simple, Jimmy. We get you some ice cream and then we throw you off the Verrazano. You got a problem with that?"



Above: Four details from paintings of mobsters in their off-hours, although the scene at the upper left, which recalls both the movie "Marathon Man" and the work of the seventeenth-century painter Gerrit van Honthorst, suggests that a mobster's work is never done. Opposite: In "Lucy and Lou," Crawford depicts a symbiotic, but not quite tender, moment between a mobster and his moll.



ALBUM

ON THE COUCH

In all his voluminous writings, Freud never mentioned the gag cartoon. What could account for this? Repression? Denial? Maybe. More likely, Freud realized that sometimes a cartoon is just a cartoon.

Although Freud may have ignored the gag cartoon, the gag cartoon did not ignore Freud and his followers. As early as the nineteen-thirties, artists such as Whitney Darrow peopled their cartoons with analysts straight out of Vienna Central Casting. Two decades later, William Steig was still using the same agency. And even in 1990, some fifty years after Freud's death, the good doctor was right at home in an Ann McCarthy cartoon.

The obsession with the analytical situation continues to this day (see page 100). In the last five years, the magazine has run more than forty cartoons depicting the shrink and the shrunk, the practitioner and the practiced upon. And, of course, the couch.

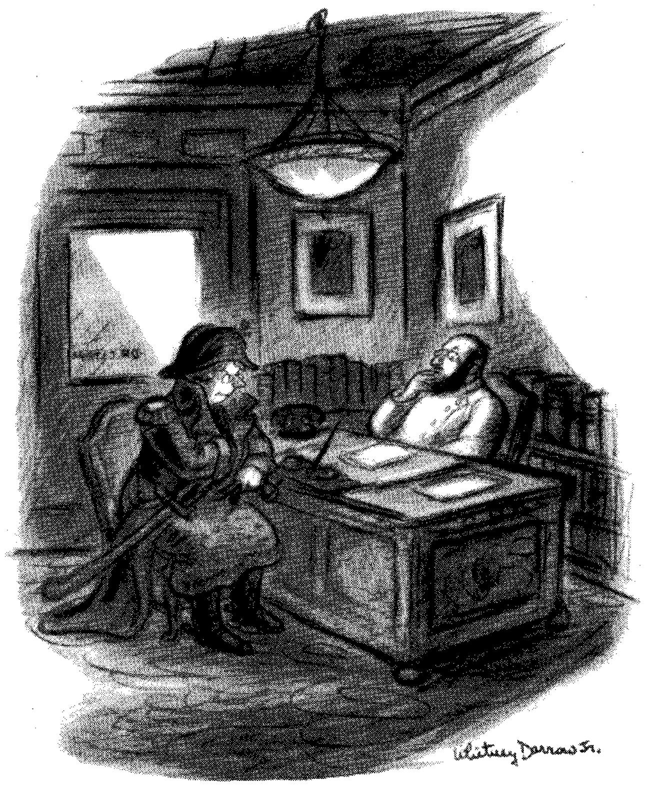
As in a dream, the components of the situation have become peculiarly malleable. The analyst may be a rabbit (Mick Stevens), and the analysand may be a chicken (Arnie Levin) or even a bowling pin (Charles Barsotti). And the couch may be reconfigured as an ejection seat (Donald Reilly). In Lee Lorenz's cartoon, human beings have departed the scene entirely, and the psychiatrist's office is inside a mouse hole.

The great gag-cartoon templates—the desert-island cartoon, the volcano cartoon, the sugar-daddy cartoon—strip humanity down to its basic drives, impulses, and motivations. What, then, are the deep, unconscious desires revealed by the couch cartoon? What are the cartoonists saying to us and about us?

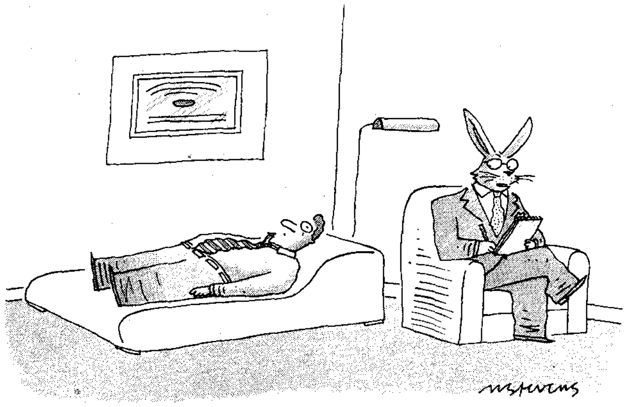
Well, let's just say that to find out we have a lot of work to do together—an awful lot. But now, at least, maybe we can begin.

Actually, not now, because our time is up

—*Robert Mankof*

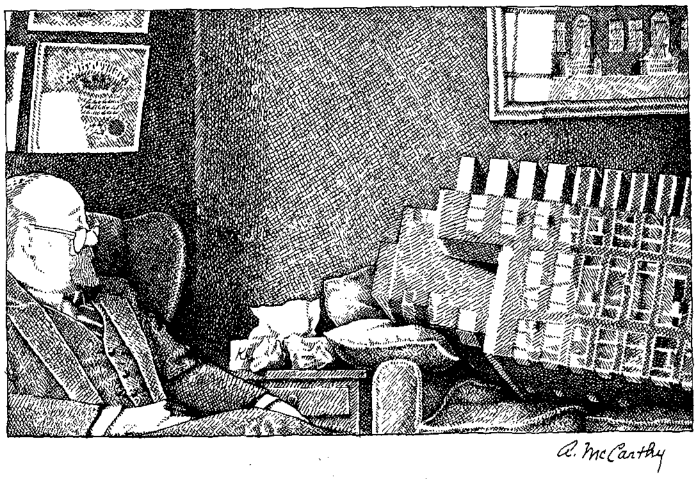


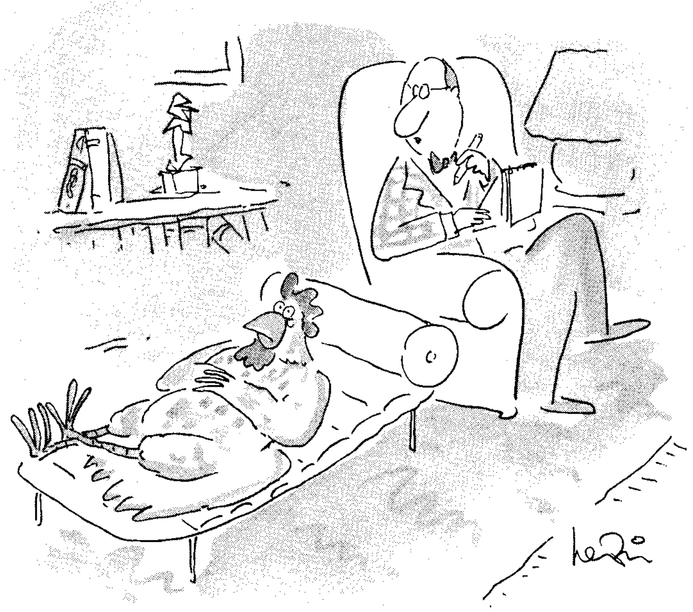
"It is unfortunate that I didn't get your case earlier, Mrs. Perkins."



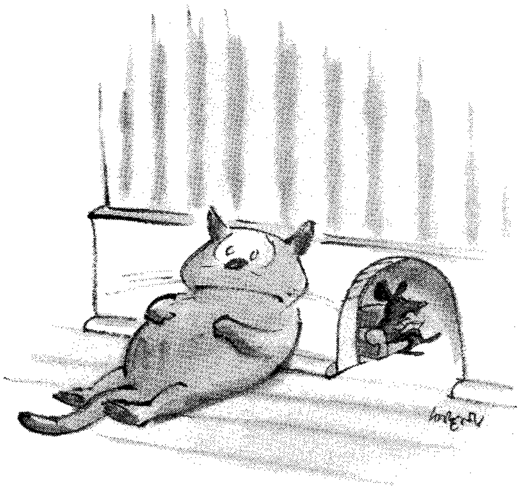
"You are a very sick rabbit."

THE APARTMENT COMPLEX

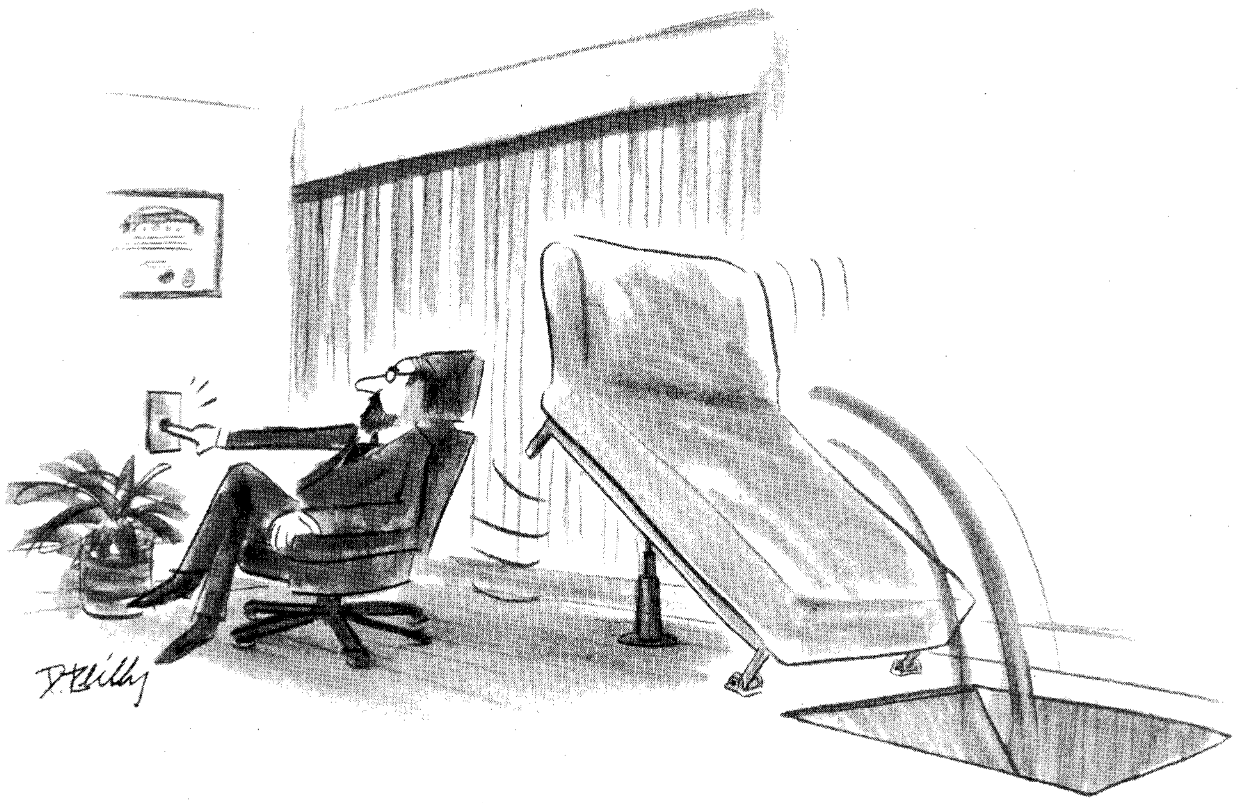


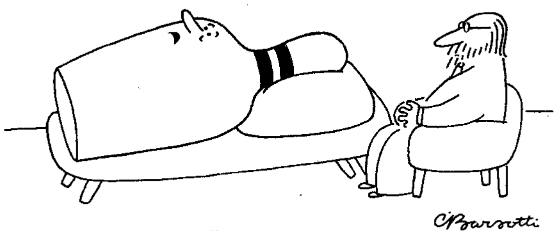


“Why do you think you cross the road?”

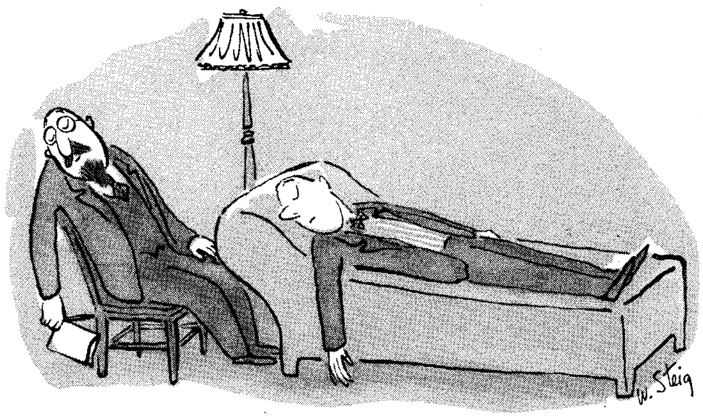


“Don’t worry. Fantasies about devouring the doctor are perfectly normal.”





“Why me?”

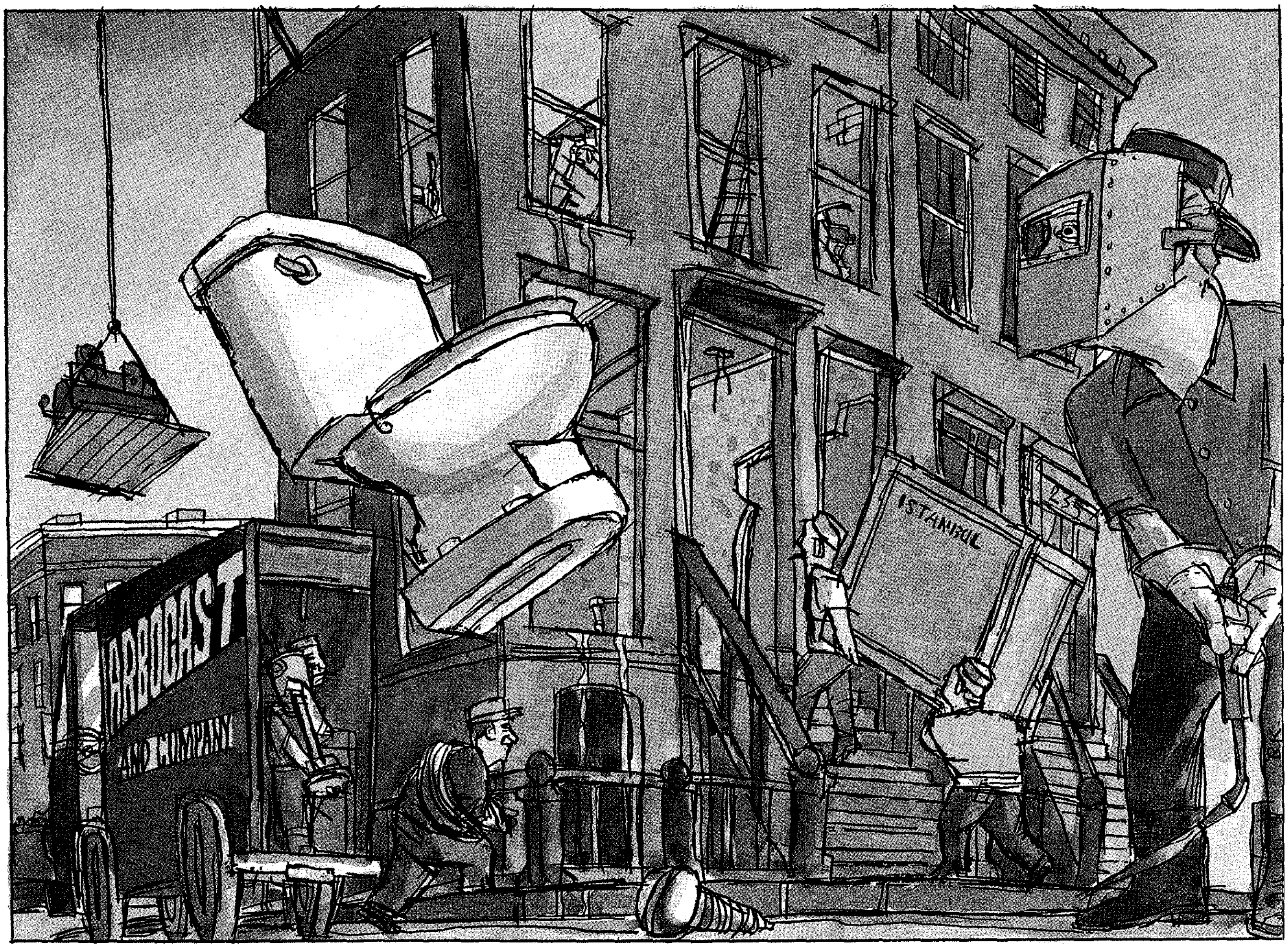


LEVIN, 11/12/90; LORENZ, 2/4/91; REILLY, 6/10/91; BARSOTTI, 5/8/00; STEIG, 1/8/55

FICTION

ON A BAD DAY YOU CAN SEE FOREVER

BY WOODY ALLEN



Members of one fairly tony New York health club dove for cover this summer as the rumbling sound that usually precedes a fault separation reverberated through their morning workout. Fears of an earthquake were soon allayed, however, as it was discovered that the only separation was a shoulder of mine, which I had mangled trying to tickle pink the almond-eyed fox who did pushups on the adjoining mat. Eager to catch her eye, I had attempted to clean and jerk a barbell equal in weight to two Steinways when my spine suddenly assumed the shape of a Möbius strip, and the lion's share of my cartilage parted audibly. Emitting the identical sound a man makes when he is thrown from the top of the Chrysler Building, I was carried out in a crouch and rendered housebound for all of July. Utilizing the enforced bed rest, I turned for solace to the great books, a mandatory list I had been meaning to get to for the past forty years or so. Arbitrarily eschewing Thucydides, the Karamazov boys, the Dialogues of Plato, and the madeleines of Proust, I hunkered down with a paperback of Dante's "Divine Comedy," hoping to revel in tableaux of raven-tressed sinners looking like they'd come directly from the pages of a Victoria's Secret catalogue as they undulated, semi-nude, in sulfur and chains. Unfortunately, the author, a stickler for the big questions, quickly dislodged me from that gauzy dream of erotica, and I found myself gadding about the nether regions with no steamier a persona than Virgil to broadcast the local color. Somewhat of a poet myself, I marvelled at how Dante had brilliantly structured this subterranean universe of just deserts for life's mischief-makers, rounding up various poltroons and miscreants, and doling to each his appropriate leve of eternal agony. It was only when I finished the book that I noticed he had lef out any special mention of contractors and, with a psyche still vibrating like sock cymbal from having renovated house some years prior, I could not bu wax nostalgic.

It all began with the purchase of

small brownstone on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Miss Wilpong, of Mengele Realtors, promised us it was the buy of a lifetime, priced modestly at a figure no higher than the cost of a stealth bomber. The dwelling was drumbeat as being in "move-in condition," and perhaps it was, for the Jukes family or a caravan of gypsies.

"It's a challenge," my wife said, breaking the women's indoor record for understatement. "This will be so fun to redo." Sidestepping some loose floorboards, I tried to remain upbeat and likened its charm to Carfax Abbey.

"Picture we lose this wall and make a big California kitchen," the distaff ranted. "There's space for a study, and each child can have her own room. With a little plumbing work we can have separate bathrooms, and I bet you could even have that game room you always wanted—to leaven your more philosophical moments with some pinball."

While fantasies of the beloved's architectural megalomania raced unchecked, the wallet in my breast pocket began to flutter like a hooked flounder. Visions of squandering all I'd carefully husbanded over years of labor while punching up eulogies for the Schneerson Brothers Burial Home caused me to take issue in the upper register of the piccolo. "You really think we need this place?" I said, praying the urge to own would abate like a petit mal.

"What I love about it is that it has no elevator," the Better Half cooed. "Can't you just picture what going up and down those five flights will do for your ticker?"

Short of embezzlement, the means to pay for this new venture were beyond me, and it took a song-and-dance man's personality to secure a mortgage from skeptical bankers, who at first waved me off but softened when they found a loophole in the usury laws. Selecting an appropriate contractor came next, and as the bids drifted in I couldn't help noticing that most of the prices quoted seemed more appropriate for a renovation of the Taj Mahal. In the end I settled on a suspiciously sensible estimate originating from the office of one Max Arbogast, alias Chic Arbogast, alias Specs Arbogast—a waxy little ectomorph with the glinting eyes of a claim jumper in a Republic Western.

When we met at the premises, some inner voice told me I was face to face with someone who would indeed blow up the silver mine while coolies toiled innocently within rather than stand them their wages. My wife, marinated by Arbogast's oily chemistry, was all eagerness, and leaned on me while she succumbed to his Coleridge-like view of what transmogrifications could be effected given the contractor's genius. Our dreams, he assured us, would be realized within six months, and he offered his firstborn as human sacrifice if the budget strayed above this projection. Grovelling in the presence of such expertise, I inquired if it were possible that he might give priority to our bedroom and bath so we could move in, thus manumitting us from an overzealous vigorish at the Dilapidado Hotel, our interim fiefdom.

"It's not even a question," Arbogast snapped, producing a contract from a valise stuffed with contracts for every conceivable transaction, from selling a used Cord to enlisting in the Mummers. "Autograph this, and the assorted particulars can be buffed down the line," he said. Thrusting a pen in my hand, he guided it across the dotted lines of a document with large blank sections, whose import, he assured me, would become manifest later by simply holding it over a low flame.

Following apace came a dizzying round of check-signings by yours truly, to bind the deal and secure various materials. "Sixty thousand dollars for molly screws seems high," I bleated.

"Sure it is, but then again you don't want the work held up while we're combing Gotham for one."

Affirming our camaraderie, we all shook hands and went around the corner to Drinks R Us, where Arbogast treated all to a magnum of Dom Pérignon, realizing only after the cork had been popped that T.W.A. had mislaid his luggage and that, even as we toasted, his billfold languished in Zanzibar.

The first time I realized we had thrown in our lot with crass bunglers came three months later, when, hours after we had actually taken possession of our under-construction domicile, I attempted to use the stall shower. Heeding our supplication for speed, Arbogast's myrmidons had bashed the original bathroom to protons and hastily fabricated a substitute. Using as their model the lengthy gash in the hull of the Titanic, they had transformed the entire bathroom into an undersea kingdom, should my wife or I attempt to turn on the tap. For lagniappe, the pipes had been meticulously calibrated to produce water pressure of such caloric intensity as to reduce any unfortunate beneath the showerhead to the status of lobster thermidor. After my squealing leap through the plate-glass door, I was assured in several Baltic tongues that all would be rectified with the expected arrival of a state-of-the-art plumbing part from Tangier, which would happen the moment certain political exiles could safely be smuggled out of the Casbah.

The bedroom, by contrast, did not quite meet our accelerated target date, owing to an outbreak of dengue fever in Machu Picchu. It seemed, in fact, that no serious work could begin in our sleeping quarters until we received vital shipments of wenge and bubinga that had somehow been misdelivered to a couple in Lapland with the same last name as ours. Fortunately, a crude pallet on the floor was arranged for us, under some falling plaster, and after a night of being martyred by asbestos dust and the sounds of Hurricane Agnes from a toilet that would not stop flushing, I lapsed at last into a hypnagogic trance. This was shattered at daybreak by a battalion of craftsmen demolishing a pilaster with pickaxes, to the tune of "Casey Jones."

When I pointed out that this particular alteration was not in the original proposal, Arbogast—who popped in to see that none of his minions had been shanghaied the prior night at any of the louche venues they watered at after hours—explained he had taken it upon himself to install an elaborate security system.

"Security?" I asked, realizing for the first time that I was more vulnerable in a brownstone than in our old co-op, where affable white-haired doormen were lavishly tipped to take a bullet for the tenants.

"Absotively," he rejoined, wolfing back his matutinal portion of sturgeon direct from Barney Greengrass's numbered vaults in Geneva. "Any serial killer can just walk into this place. Maybe you want your throat sliced while you sleep? Or your main squeeze should get her brains scrambled by some drifter with a ball-peen hammer and a grudge against

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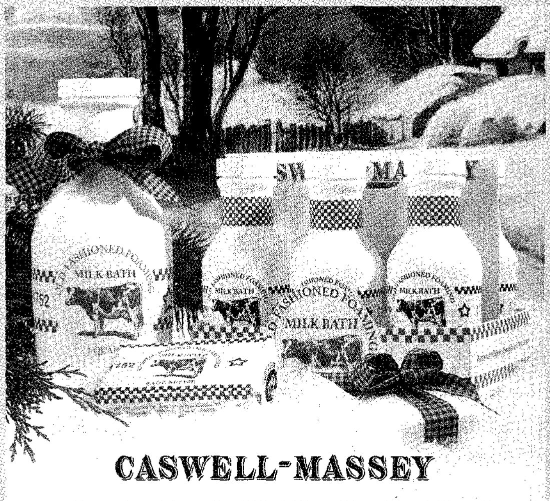

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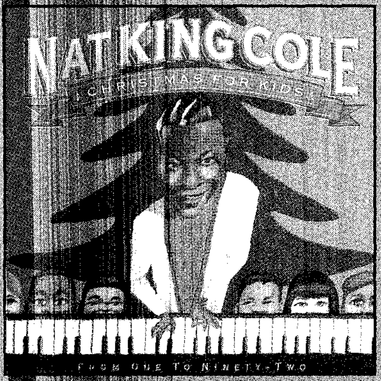

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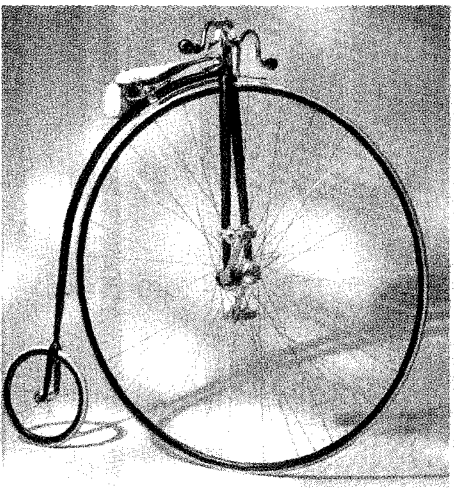

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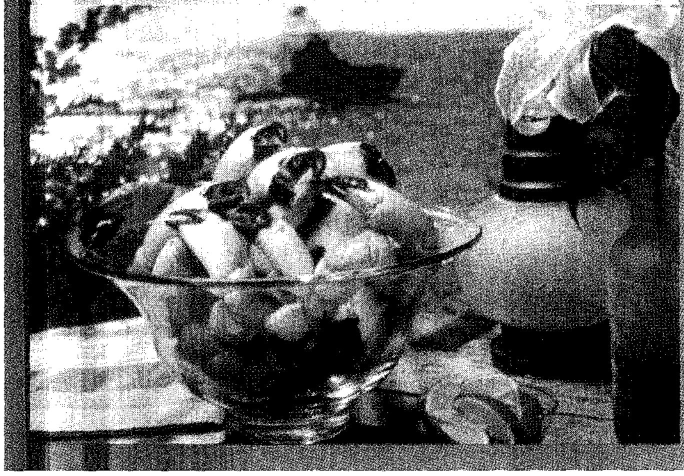

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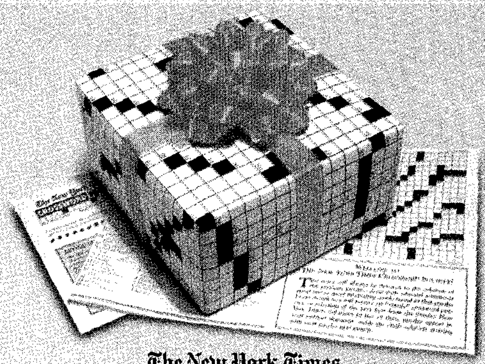

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society? And that's after he's had his way with her."

"Do you really think—"

"It's not what *I* think, Pilgrim. This town is awash with diabolical mental tinderboxes."

With that, he scribbled in an additional ninety thousand dollars on the estimate, which had waxed to the girth of the Talmud while rivalling it in possible interpretations.

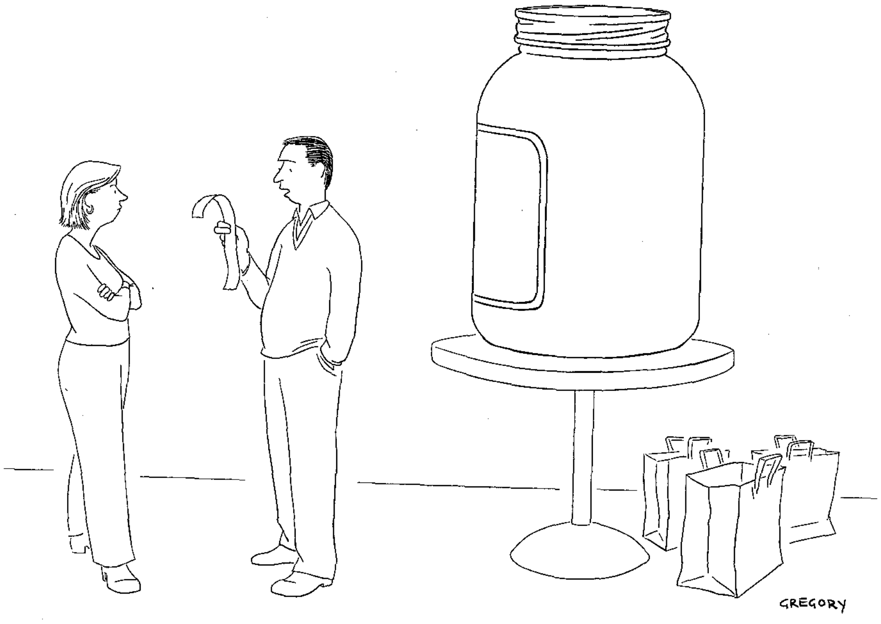
Not wanting to be smirked at by the workers as an easy mark, I insisted that before I could agree to any new costs I would have to peruse the nuances of the risk-reward ratio, a formula that I understood with the same firm grasp I had on quantum mechanics. Since several hot stocks I had invested in recently had vanished without a trace into the Bermuda Triangle, I finally told the work foreman I couldn't dredge up another penny for a burglar-alarm system, but when night fell I froze in bed hearing what I concluded was a homicidal maniac unscrewing the front door. With my heart pounding like the bombing of Dresden, I got Arbogast on the horn and green-lighted the installation of a set of pricey, high-tech Tibetan motion detectors.

As the months passed, our completion date, already postponed half a dozen times, kept receding like a six-pack in the desert. Alibis abounded to rival the "Arabian Nights." Several plasterers went down with mad cow, and then the boat carrying crates of jade and lapis lazuli to line the nanny's room was sunk off the coast of Auckland by a tsunami; finally, a crucial motorized device needed to elevate the TV from a trunk at the foot of the bed turned out to be hand-fashioned exclusively by elves who worked only by moonlight. The microscopic amount of work that actually took place was shoddy, as I learned in the midst of a sparkling exchange between myself and a Nobel contender in our brand-new study, when the floor buckled, costing the potential laureate his two front teeth and earning me the honor of sponsoring a record settlement.

When I confronted Arbogast with my disenchantment over cost overruns that were challenging the German inflation of the nineteen-twenties, he laid it off to my "psychotic demand for change orders."

"Relax, cousin," he said. "If you'll stop your tergiversating, Arbogast and Company will be history in four weeks. My hand to God."

"And not a moment too soon," I fumed. "I can't coexist another second with this infestation from Stonehenge. There's not a scintilla of privacy. Just yesterday, after finally filching some measure of Lebensraum, I was about to consummate the sacred act of love with my one and only profiterole when your workers picked me up and moved me so they could hang a sconce."



"O.K. Fair enough. That's a great price for mayonnaise."

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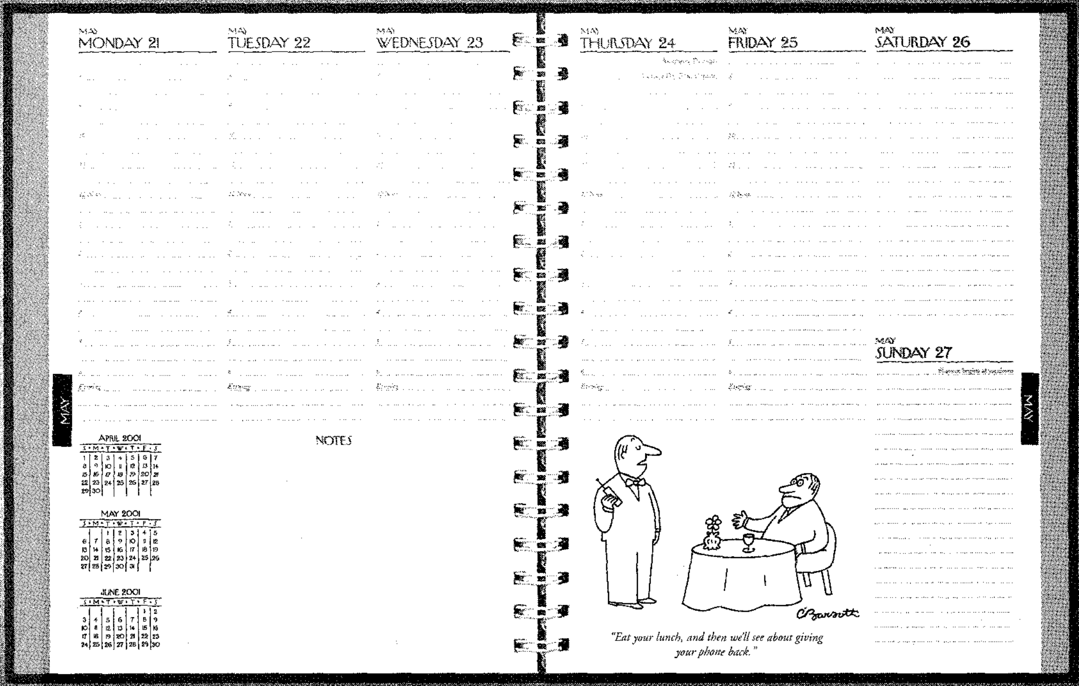
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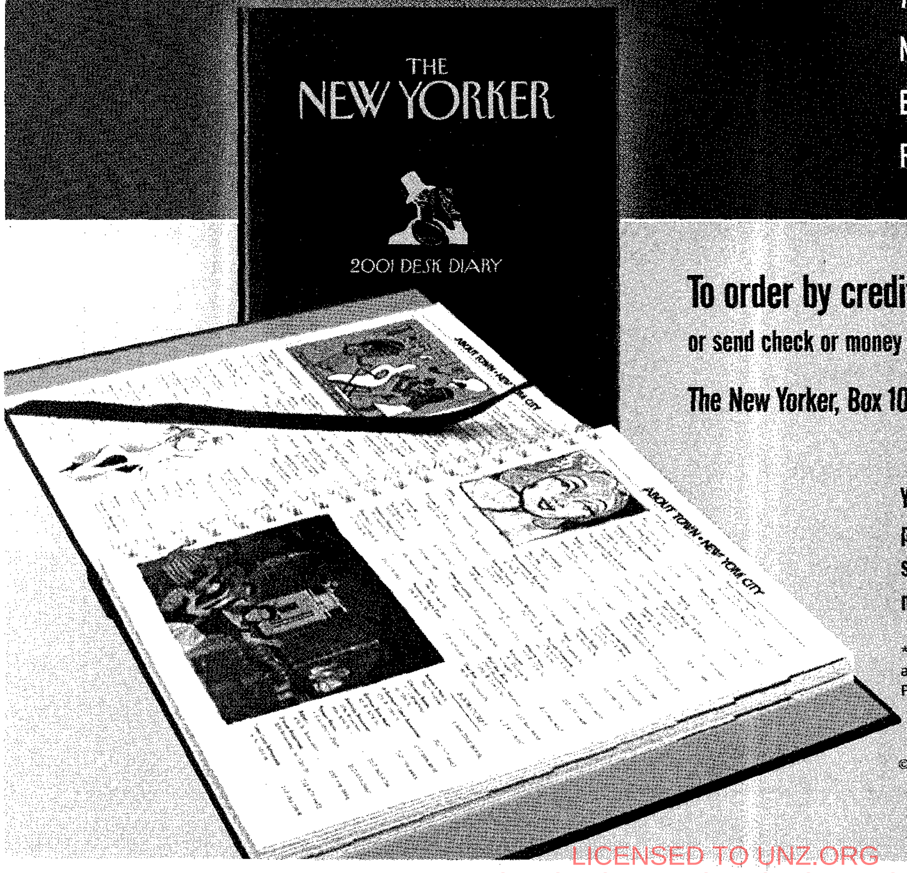
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See these?” Arbogast said, flashing
ile usually employed by men who
bout to commit mail fraud. “They’re
d Xanax. Dig in—although I wouldn’t
more than thirty a day. The side-
t studies have been inconclusive.”
hat midnight, a susurrus triggered
lownstairs motion detector, causing
o leap directly upright out of bed
emain there like a hovercraft. Con-
d that I could make out the sounds
salivating lycanthrope vaulting up
tairs, I flailed through unpacked
ns in search of some silver object
which to defend the family. Step-
on my glasses in panic, I bolted face
nto a porphyry dolphin Arbogast
imported to complete the maid’s
oom. The blow caused my middle
ring like the Arthur Rank logo and
ded me as well with an unimpeded
of the aurora borealis. I think it
en that the ceiling collapsed on my
Apparently the pilaster Arbogast
emoved to install the security sys-
ad been a supporting member and
ber of cinder blocks had chosen
oment to abdicate.

the morning I was found curled
the floor sobbing rhythmically.
pouse had been led away by a
woman in a severe suit, wearing
med man’s hat, to whom she kept
ng something about always hav-
een dependent on the kindness
angers. In the end, we sold the
for a song. I can’t recall if it was
Blue” or “Brother, Can You Spare
ne?” I do remember the faces of
ilding inspectors, however, and
mixture of zeal and dismay with
they enumerated my sundry vio-
, which they said could be rectified
er further contracting work or ac-
g a lethal injection. I also have
lim recall of being before a judge
t glowering like an El Greco car-
s he mulcted me to the tune of
zeros, causing my net worth to
ear like the lox at a *bris*. As for
ast, legend has it that, while at-
ng to hijack an expensive Geor-
antel from someone’s fireplace and
it with a ceramic copy, he man-
get stuck in the flue. Whether
ultimately consumed by flames I
now. I tried finding him in Dante’s
, but I guess they don’t update
assics. ♦

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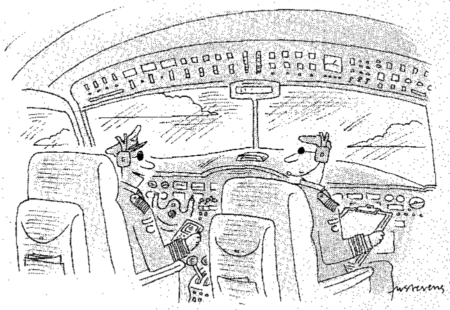

“This is so cool! I’m flying this thing completely on my Palm pilot!”

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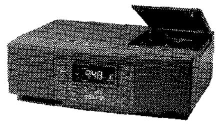

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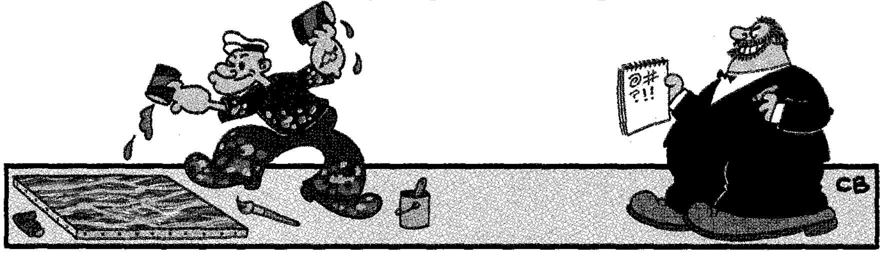

BOOKS

WAITING FOR HULOT

A new life of Jacques Tati, the patient master of the gag.

BY ANTHONY LANE

When people think of Jacques Tati, what do they think? They probably think of "Monsieur Hulot's Holiday," which came out in 1953. They may not have seen it for many years, and it will thus have acquired the chafed and faded aspect of a picture postcard. Nothing could be more appropriate, for the film itself, even at first viewing, feels like a memory, reporting back from a past we never had—a string of delicious sensations, as tart and insubstantial as a sorbet. If you can't quite remember the story, that could be because there is none, or, at best, only a ghost of one: a man goes to the seaside, lunches, dines, plays an unwittingly vicious game of tennis, and so on. He converses with a young woman and arranges to go riding with her, but there are unforeseen horse problems and he never shows. Between them is the merest glint of romance, not only unfulfilled but unbegun. Finally, none the wiser, the man takes his leave, though not before touching off a shackful of celebratory fireworks. There is little for him to celebrate, aside from the fact—we can't prove it, but we would be mortified to learn otherwise—that he has been to this place before and will come again. His brief summer, in all its sandy frustration, is the climax of a plotless life.

Hulot was devised and played by Tati, who directed all four films in which his creation appeared; after the non-adventure of Hulot's vacation, there were calls for "Hulot in London" or "Hulot Goes West," but, as a man of infinite pains, Tati waited five years to create "Mon Oncle" and nine more before unveiling "Playtime," the catastrophic crown of his career. "Traffic" followed in 1971, and for Hulot that was the end of the road. Like most serious artists, not least of the comic variety, Tati knew only one way to meet public demand, and that was to answer the needs of his own private imaginings, and then to cross his fingers and see if anyone out there was interested. His films don't look much like anyone else's—if you had seen nothing but "Monsieur Hulot's Holiday," or even a few stills from it, you could come into a room where "Mon Oncle" was showing on TV and know within seconds whom you were looking at—and they sure as hell don't sound like anyone else's. Half the time, they don't even sound like films. They sound as though someone were holding a radio to your ear and slowly spinning the dial.

Tati was a career funnyman; whether he himself was a funny man is a moot point, but, once the cameras rolled, his dedication to the gag became that of the unappeasable, almost humorless purist. He arrived at simplicity—the visual punch line that gets you in the guts—by means of outrageous complication, and even his most basic jokes have the telling Tati slant. The sight of a man falling into water is unlikely to make you laugh, but Tati returned to it again and again, as if the very plainness of the action challenged his powers of elaborative wit. In "Jour de Fête," his first masterpiece, he misses a turn and bicycles into a river. He is not looking where he is going because he is too busy imitating the head-down sprint technique of the professional cyclists he has just passed; even better, he finds time, while soaring through the air, to look sidewise with a whip of the head, as if trying to work out what happened to the road. In "Monsieur Hulot's Holiday," he trips over a cable and flies off a wharf. We hear the immortal *poing* of the wire, we see him fly, but we do not see him hit the water; all we have is an exquisite, three-second silence as we wait for the offscreen splash. Finally, in "Mon Oncle," Hulot steps blindly, if demurely, into an ornamental pond—not because he is carrying a chair on his head but because that particular chair has a tasselled fringe that, when inverted, is enough to hide his eyes. This is slapstick heaven, lovingly tricked out with wrong turns and spookily shorn of pain; the angel is in the details.

We do not know much about Hulot; he has no wife, no children, and our only glimpse of his house—a Rube Goldberg affair, overstocked with stairways, in "Mon Oncle"—is from the outside. In the first three Hulot films, he holds no discernible job, and his attempt to get one ends in disgrace, when a typical slither of misunderstandings, beginning with builder's plaster on the sole of his shoe, ends with the interviewer dismissing him for peeping into the women's lavatory. She is quite wrong, of course, not only in her construing of the evidence but in ascribing sexual curiosity of any kind to so scrupulously lustless a gentleman. Even if Hulot remains a cipher, however, his conduct—his physical strategy for the steeplechase of daily existence—has become as familiar as Chaplin's, and if he really is the alter ego of Jacques Tati then the urge to discover more of the ego in question is overwhelming. Enlightenment has now arrived, thanks to David Bellos, whose "Jacques Tati: His Life and Art" (Harvill; $40) is by far the most attentive biography to date.

For a start, Tati, born in 1907, was not Tati, any more than Walter Matthau was Matthau. Half the great movie personae started life as someone else and never let up; Matthau was a billboard-busting Matuschanskayasky, and Tati, more elegantly, was Tatischeff. His father was half Russian and half French, his mother half Italian and half Dutch; the exotic list of ingredients may help us un-

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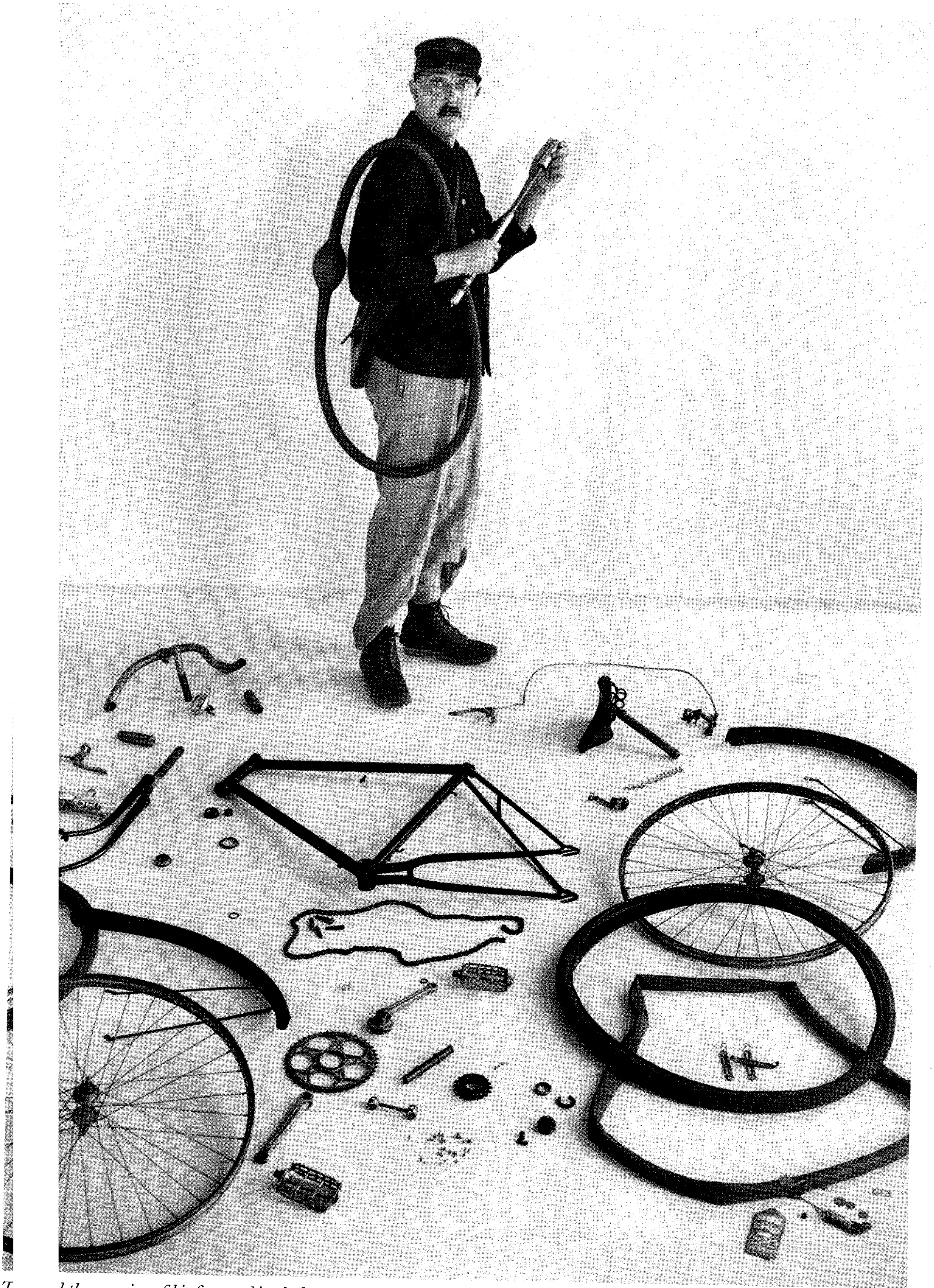

T l the remains of his famous bicycle from "Jour de Fête," photographed by Robert Doisneau in 1949.

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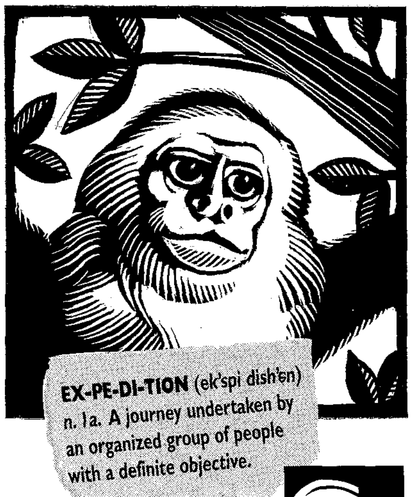

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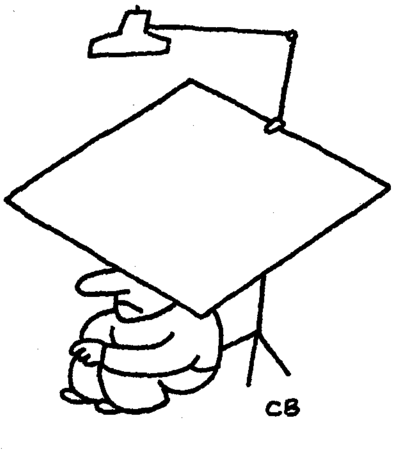
derstand why Hulot, the apotheosis of the Gallic, also leaves behind him, as if to mingle with his pipe smoke, a faint air of the self-effacing Everyman—hailing from anywhere and belonging nowhere in particular. Tati *père* went into the picture-framing business, following his father-in-law, and did very nicely; he was followed in turn by young Jacques, who did less well, although, given that his framing of cinematic compositions was to grow almost Kubrick-like in its obsessive caution, something must have stuck. What Tati excelled at, it turned out, was a range of less delicate skills: rugby, riding, and dancing the Charleston.

David Bellos previously wrote "Georges Perec: A Life in Words" and has translated many of the novelist's famously demanding works, including "Life: A User's Manual." It is all the more creditable, then, that he should have turned for his next trick to a man who, by his own account, "hardly read anything." Nor, Bellos adds, "did he like writing things down." Tati was as ludic and precise as Perec, but in a medium shorn of verbal flourish; most Tati pictures feel far more heavily choreographed than scripted. He never hung with the intellectual circles of Paris, although his work was suspiciously to their taste; and, for all the rigor of his artistry, he was perhaps the least arty figure in French cinema. Bellos has a good chapter on Tati's military service, which the twenty-year-old beanpole spent with the Sixteenth Dragoons, a cavalry regiment stationed outside Paris. "For sheer comic effect," he recalled more than half a century later, "no clown, no supposedly amusing film, can match the first riding lesson of a squad of raw recruits."

What matters about Tati the rugby player, apart from the thought of that darting, long-boned figure bearing down on his terrified opponents, is what happened after each match: in the locker room, he would apparently replay the entire match for his own benefit—"in a kind of trance," as Bellos puts it. This knack was noticed, and Tati was asked to repeat the routine for an audience, at club dinners; it was soon worked up into an act entitled "Sporting Impressions," which an impoverished Tati then took to the boards of the music halls. The targets of his mime were a cyclist, a boxer, a goalkeeper in soccer, an angler, and a centaurish blend of horse and rider, and as Tati switched to film—he was infuriatingly vague about the transition, and Bellos, perhaps unavoidably, keeps pretty quiet about it—the action never stopped. The first film in which Tati appeared was a 1932 short about tennis; there was a boxing match in "Work on Your Left," in 1936, and his first movie of any consequence, the fifteen-minute "L'École des Facteurs," was about a cycling postman. The postman then got a whole film to himself, the glorious "Jour de Fête," while both tennis and horseback-riding—or bridling horseplay, at any rate—made a comeback appearance in "Monsieur Hulot's Holiday." In the last film that he directed, "Parade," Tati performed, in refined but essentially unaltered form, his sporting impressions; he was back where he began. That was in 1974, and we gain a touching sense, as with Buster Keaton, of skills learned and burnished with such graceful application in an artist's springy youth that, like his best friends, they remain in service through the fall and winter of his career; the habits of the body are thankfully more ingrained than any ideas concocted by the mind, and always, in some mysterious way, more telling than the motions of the soul. The great cycle of life, for Jacques Tati, was not so much a matter of cosmic truth as something that you pedalled into a hedge. Both, of course, could be a pain in the ass.

Everyone loves "Jour de Fête," just as everyone, even an entrenched Englishman, likes a certain idea of France. Finished in 1947 but not released until 1949, the film is set in a village named Follainville (in reality, Sainte-Sévère), embedded in deep country—so deep that you could be forgiven for treating it as timeless. In this malodorous Eden,



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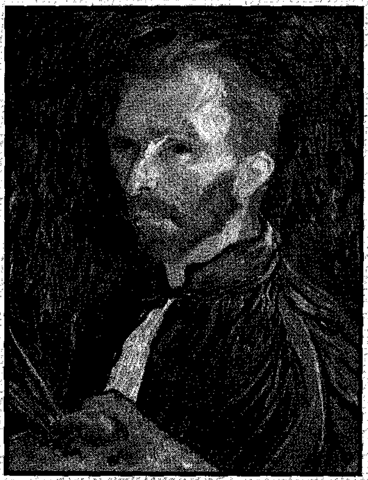

Vincent van Gogh, *Self-Portrait,* 1889

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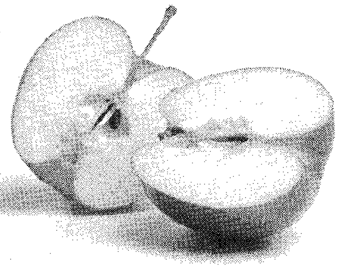

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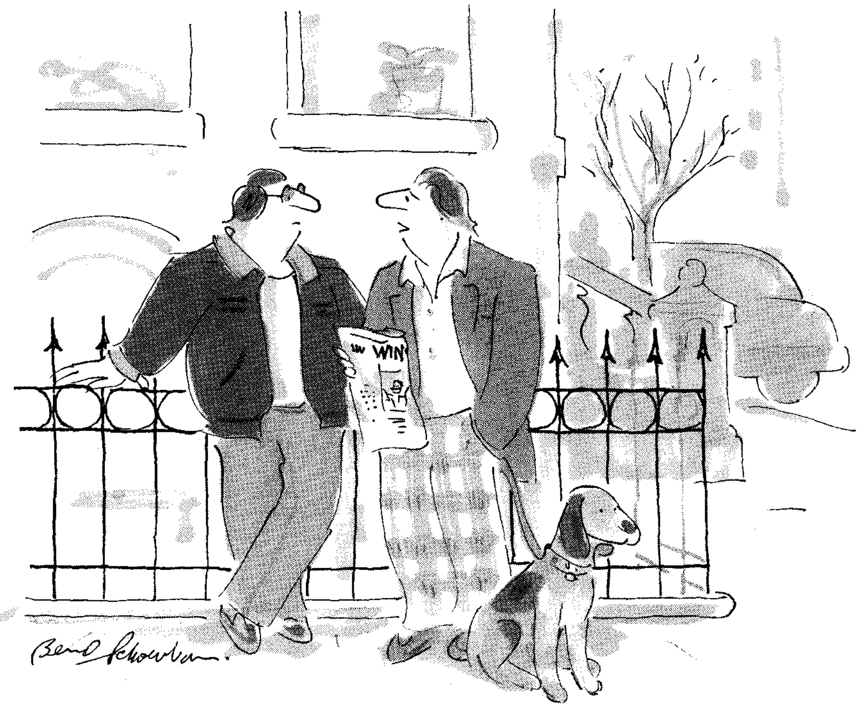

"If I'd known he was going to win, I never would have voted for him."

• •

the only serpent is progress. All the trappings are in place: skipping kids, foggy hangovers, and a scrunched old peasant with a goat. (She wanders around like a cackling chorus, commenting on her neighbors, including, at one vertiginous moment, "Old Godot." Beckett wrote his play between 1948 and 1949.) When Tati's character, François the mailman, comes to deliver a letter to the farrier, the guy is busy shoeing a horse, so François deftly flips up the animal's tail and tucks the letter underneath. We are so carefully cushioned with gentleness that it comes as quite a shock to see a couple of American servicemen lounging by the side of a road, next to a jeep marked "Military Police." The film was shot in the raddled aftermath of war, and Bellos is assiduous in reminding us of that weird proximity; the chugging tractor that hauls the components of a fun fair into the village square, passing gilded fields where the locals make hay, was borrowed from a farmer, because the waiting list for a new one would have been unending. "Less than three years before the shoot began," Bellos writes, "the Gestapo still had an office on the main square of Sainte-Sévère."

"Jour de Fête" was a great success; it won the prize for best screenplay at the Venice Film Festival—a notable achievement for a film that contains more chicken squawk than dialogue, but also a demonstration that viewers everywhere were thirsty for amnesiac art. Tati himself, after a brief spell in the defeated French Army, had spent the war playing the clubs and music halls of Paris; he had also performed in Berlin, although his judicious biographer points out that this was not uncommon, triggered more by penury and ethical slackness than by any will to collaborate. (Maurice Chevalier, for instance, did far worse, and was welcomed back to Hollywood.) According to Bellos, Tati "was neither a war hero, nor a member of the Resistance, nor an active collaborator. . . . In other words, he behaved like most French men and women." His genius for the ordinary, inherited from Chaplin, enabled Tati both to root his gags in common experience, lightly soiled and easily recognized, and to cultivate the sweet-smelling myth that a trauma of extraordinary proportions had been little more than a bad dream. The shell-shocked may well flee gratefully into the arms of an idyll, and there is little in "Jour de Fête" that would have troubled the senses of the Vichy regime; you half expect Captain Renault, on the run from Casablanca, to turn up as the village mayor.

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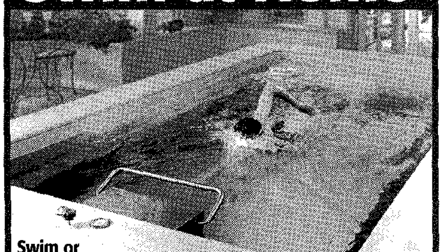
Does this determination to look the other way, if not to wipe clean, persist into "Monsieur Hulot's Holiday"? Is there something more than an orderly aesthetic—something morally willed—in its tableaux of calculated whimsy? If so, Tati would hardly have been the first Frenchman to throw himself into the notation of noontide joy as a means of dismissing the shadows; Matisse retired to a tropical paradise inside his villa while his wife and daughter fought in the French Resistance, and, nearly two hundred and fifty years earlier, some of Watteau's *fêtes galantes*, all fans and lutes, were painted when starving Parisians were feasting on the dead. Bellos doesn't labor the point, but it had never occurred to me that the summer of 1952, when the film was shot on location, "was the first in which holidays had once again become possible for the French middle classes." In other words, people in France rushed to the coast much as moviegoers around the world then lined up to see them rush; there is such balmy relief in watching the movie, which guides us through the jokes as if they were paintings in a gallery, that we may not notice the grit in its eye. Although Tati's gaze is benign—it would grow colder, if never caustic—he neatly dots the days with specks of the weary and the fractious. (This is, after all, a vacation.) Critics often chastise him for his pallid lack of interest in character, but "Monsieur Hulot's Holiday" provides a withering portrait of a marriage. A middle-aged British couple idle through the scenery, the broad-hatted wife exclaiming brightly, "Look! A boat!," the scolded husband not daring, or even bothering, to complain. As she hands him seashells, to be stored as mementos of this placid imprisonment, he glances at each one and tosses it away.

In person, the director was seldom lavish with his feelings, and Bellos offers many instances in which Tati's reserve—and, increasingly, a pride in his own inventive gifts—tightened and pursed into rudeness. Yet the movies, especially in the first half of his life, glitter with a kind of emotional pointillism; individual gags seem neutral, lit only by technical brilliance, but they accrue into a strange panorama of loss, inviting us to laugh with a clear conscience at the stunting of insignificant hopes. My two favorite se-



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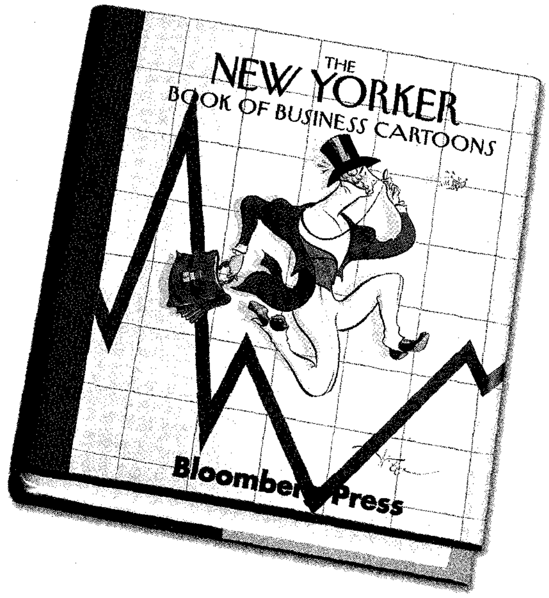

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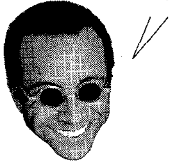

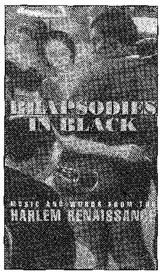
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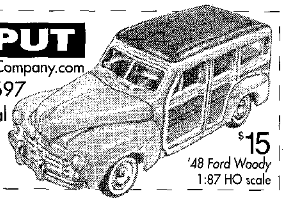

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quences consist of Tati in solitude; he makes only loose connection with other folk, but, left to his own destructive devices, he allows the basic centrifuge of his nature to spin. On a moon-drenched night in "Jour de Fête," the mailman—much the worse for drink, and all the better for it—tries to ride his bicycle next to a fence, and there is nothing lovelier in Tati than the *thunk* of his front wheel meeting an apple tree and the mild, Hesperian rain of fruit upon his head. For his part, Hulot, in riding gear, goes to a boarding house on a date; he is seen to a living room and asked to wait. By the time the girl comes down, he has taken the place to the verge of chaos and steered it back again, the crisis deepening when the spur of his boot hooks the open mouth of a fox pelt on the floor. He is annoyed, but not unhappy, at this constant stream of mishaps, and Hulot would scarcely be himself if the flow dried up. Not since the perfecting of silent cinema had anyone nudged us so neatly toward the essential conundrum of comedy: do we make things happen or do they happen to us? If I find myself being chased around an empty room in Normandy by a fox, even a dead one, whose fault is that? Why was it so predictable that when Tati had the honor of an audience with the Pope, in 1958, a mixup led to the Holy Father's addressing him on the subject of gas, electricity, and plumbing?

In the major works of Tati's maturity—"Mon Oncle" and "Playtime"—the balance undoubtedly tips. Not a whole lot happens in these movies, apart from Hulot's getting snarled up in unfamiliar settings, but, by any reckoning, they were grand designs; Tati's preparation for each movie, and his control on set, allowed almost no room for maneuver, and Bellos includes a photograph of the director showing one of his actors the precise way in which he should sweep the street. The centerpiece of "Mon Oncle" is a modern house in a Paris suburb: chalk-white and cuboid, marked by brief shrieks of color, tricked out with meaningless gadgets and, by way of a gushing centerpiece, a statue of a spewing fish in the garden. "Playtime" takes that idea and multiplies it a hundredfold. We are now in Tativille, as it came to be known: an actual conurbation that was constructed solely for the purposes of the movie, complete with soaring office blocks and functioning road systems. It stood in southeast Paris, and took six months to build, starting in September, 1964; the film did not screen until 1967, and in the meantime Tati had mortgaged everything he owned. By the end, he had almost nothing; his own house was repossessed, and his life's work, including all rights, was sold off to an Italian banker with no interest in cinema. Tati was tided over, in part, with money raised from his fellow rugby players; a loyal man, he had kept in touch for half a century. He died in 1982, after a decade of sporadic work that included a commercial for low-fat yogurt; according to some friends, he wanted his body to be taken out with the trash.

To this day, "Playtime" has never been properly released in America. Even the prints that screen elsewhere are disfigurements of the original; to hit the two-hour mark, Tati amputated twenty minutes that have not been seen since. "Playtime" was shot in 70 mm., which somehow magnifies the disaster; it becomes his "Heaven's Gate," his "Apocalypse Now," except that those pictures can boast the sprawl and strife, the sheer loudness of mouth that befit a broken epic, whereas what Tati ruined himself for was, when you come down to it, the chance to see a chair covered in black plastic make a funny sighing sound when he sat on it. Few of the gags are louder than that, and many of them, tucked away in remote corners of the screen, will pass you by until you see the film for the fourth time—itself an improbable event. As Bellos wrote of "Jour de Fête," "Tati treats the dialogue track as if it consisted of background noise, and sets the background noise in forward perspective, as if that were where the story really lay." Tati is the only filmmaker I can think of who was brave enough, and mad enough, to suggest that we can operate without a center of attention—or, at any rate, that our attention tends to flicker and flip with such speed that we don't need a center. This theory (Tati labelled it "democratic") flies in the face of all aesthetic evidence; surely we yearn to focus on *something*. Tati would argue that he had life on his side; that in the echoing halls and airport lounges of "Playtime," lightly peopled with stragglers we can't place and itchy with muttered conversations in tongues we half understand, we are getting, at long last, a simulacrum—a sporting impression—of being alive.

The reputation of Jacques Tati has itself suffered from slapstick. It slipped and fell well before his death, then sprang to its feet, only to sink once more; you rarely hear contemporary directors mention his name, and Bellos was bold to go public with his admiration. Most movie stars would beg for a biography like this; shy of dumb hero worship, stoutly defensive of genuine inspiration, it throws nothing more than polite glances at the personal life of its subject, preferring to unpick the stitching of his jokes, or to step back and stare at the society from which he emerged, and which he could never quite bring himself to flay.

By rights, "Mon Oncle," "Playtime," and "Traffic" should seethe and spit; they hold modern architecture, modern manners, and modern communications up to the light, and we expect the worst. Whereupon Tati comes to the conclusion that, far from being oppressed, mankind has done rather well to surmount these various innovations—which are, admittedly, good for a laugh. "All Tati's work . . . is essentially angled toward reconciliation, not revolt," Bellos says. "Tati was not out to change the world, but to help us look at it with less horror." There is less venom in the whole of "Traffic," or, indeed, in the whole of Tati, than there is in a single tracking shot by Jean-Luc Godard: the slow, infamous procession, in "Weekend," along a row of stalled or stuttering cars, with the camera gliding nervelessly past the fatal wreck that caused the gridlock and the corpses lying untended, as if awaiting vultures, by the side of the road. This is where you are heading, Godard says, eager to blow up

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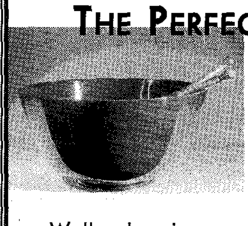
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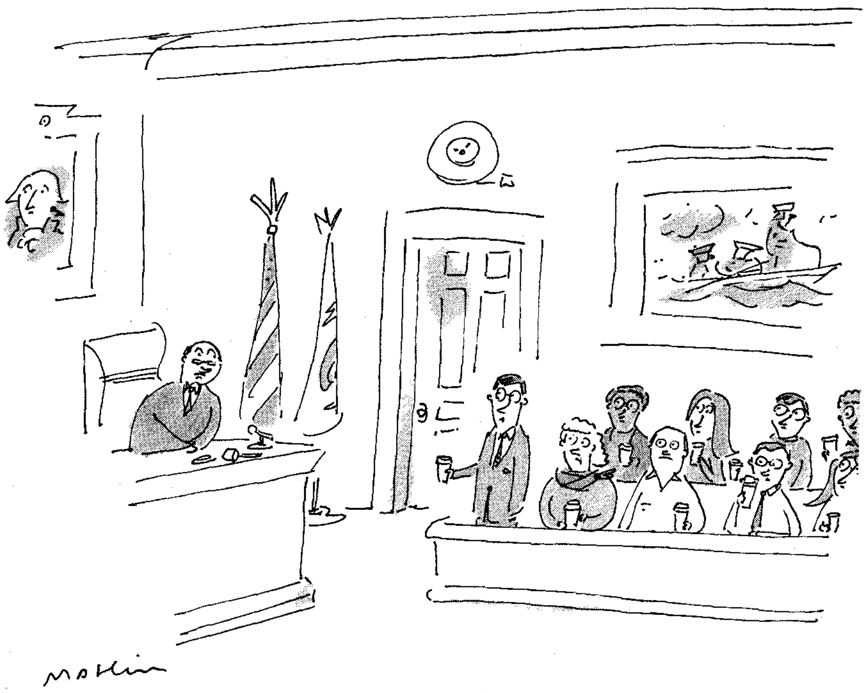

"We, the jury, find our lattes too cinnamony."

• •

the culture before it runs out of gas, whereas "Playtime" ends with the serene vision of a rotary system transformed into a carrousel; the cars circle without haste or wrath, buoyed by a fluting score, and suddenly we feel ourselves back in the warm air of "Jour de Fête." Tati's career is thus bracketed by fun fairs; against all the odds, the land of lost content is regained, the spirit of cornfields reborn amid glass and concrete. This is the sheerest fantasy, just as Godard has to overreach himself in the damning of bourgeois indifference. You can feel the drive, at once bullheaded and balletic, of both directors; both of them, impatient with the world as they find it, set about reorganizing it—Tati to his satisfaction, Godard to meet the high standard of his disgust.

Yet Godard was a Tati fan, and it is he who nailed, in a single sentence, the imperishable oddity of Tati's comic approach: "He sees problems where there are none, and finds them." Just what manner of mind would dream of a circumstance in which the bulbous, old-style horn of a car would be stuck to the spare tire, which would fall off and rotate against the ground, which in turn would make the horn emit regular honks, which in turn would cause a nearby hunter to pause in mid-shoot, swivel, and fire at

what he believes to be approaching duck
That flirtation with the surreal, nev
quite yielding, keeps "Monsieur Hulo
Holiday," like its elastic hero, on its to
As the movies proceed, however, th
harden up in a rage for exactitude, a
the fullness of their curiosity dwindles
the ambition swells; "Playtime" is
tounding, but to think back to "Jour
Fête" is to trace the arc of a man w
began as a Brueghel and wound up a
Mondrian. Late Tati discovers amu
ment not so much in things that he,
Hulot, happens to observe as in gags t
have been primed like booby traps
there are high, round windows in
house in "Mon Oncle," for instance
is because, when the lights come on
night, a figure can appear at each porth
and move from side to side, thus creat
the illusion of huge, inquiring ey
There is, I have to admit, nothing par
ularly funny about that, although every
smiles at the cunning of the concei
sometimes have the sense, when stran
in deepest Tati, that I am watchin
game of chess, or a puppetry demonst
tion, that was accidentally transfer
to film.

There will always be those who d
get Tati—who are repelled by the c
patience of such manipulation, or v
simply find Hulot an intrusive bore.

ıg to the slender body of work,
its unexpected intensity, I found
f welcoming the intrusion, and
ıg forward to the arrival of that
ıng shape, with its continual sug-
n of a man about to morph into a
ɔn. The props hardly vary: rain-
ɔipe, umbrella, and pants just short
h to show a sticklike pair of an-
Chere are no bends. If I could take
e to a Tati retrospective, it would
clid; he alone, perhaps, would ap-
te the stern mastery of unswerving
nd the implication that a human
can be measured by the angle at
he meets—and, more often than
emolishes—his environment. Ev-
ıg is Hulot's fault, and yet he is
to blame: when the swish, hushed
ant falls apart in the climactic sec-
t of "Playtime," Hulot is merely
g a helping hand to the inevitable
y of the modern age.

does so, of course, with reflex, an-
d courtesy; I love Tati film posters,
ey can never catch the stiff bob,
ınce on the balls of the feet, the tip
hat to belles and bounders alike.

our own time is too informal for
omedy; Tati was one of the last,
rtists to operate on the Wildean
le that anarchy is best practiced
the confines of codified behav-
at he came to resemble Charles
lle—increasingly so, as one movie
led another—merely completes
ure, with the savior of the nation
g his mirror image in the man
ithout really trying, kept tripping
ected areas of the nation and rip-
em to bits. Mind you, all French-
distinction, even such arch anti-
ts as Mitterrand, seem to acquire
ile and demeanor of the General;
all it the hauteur theory. David
ecords the occasion when the two
ilm director and President—came
face. "Jacques Tati," murmured
sident's secretary. There was a
'Mon Oncle,'" he added help-
ereupon de Gaulle congratulated
ed Tati on his nephew. It sounds
en if it isn't; the same can be said
's unmistakable œuvre, which
s, in case we hadn't guessed, how
n there is to be had in tinkering
e intricate mechanisms of the
Ve can come together; all it takes
misunderstanding. ♦

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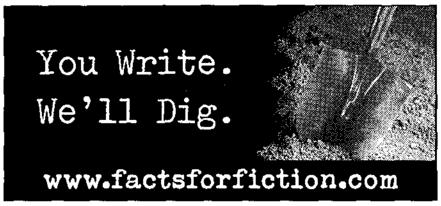

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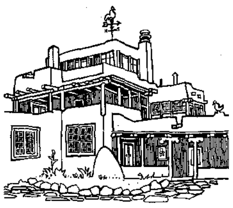

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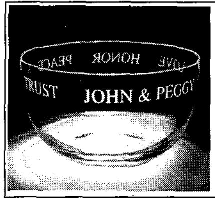

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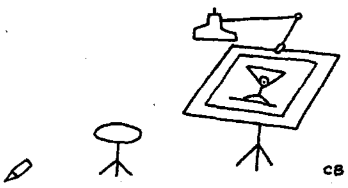
Schmidt Delivered, *by Louis Begley (Knopf; $25).* Here the antihero of "About Schmidt" returns, in a comedy of manners so dry it crackles. Albert Schmidt is a retired lawyer who torments his only daughter with ingeniously manipulative trust arrangements, then wonders why she doesn't visit him in the Hamptons home he shares with Carrie, a Puerto Rican trophy waitress. This time out, everyone's after either cash or Carrie, and Schmidt's foils include a meddlesome billionaire, an ambitious masseur, and a motormouth handyman. Once again, Begley, with his impeccable ear for Episcopalianisms and his gift for humiliating sexual entanglements, engineers an improbably cozy ending—even though it isn't exactly clear who is ending up with what.

Highlanders, *by Yo'av Karny (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $27).* No region of the former U.S.S.R. has been as difficult to get a handle on as the Caucasus, but Karny, an Israeli journalist, manages to do so in four hundred dense, digressive pages. After first establishing that the Caucasus is, in reality, made up of several dozen tiny, ancient nations, he proceeds to paint a series of sharp miniatures. The kaleidoscopic result is almost dizzying; there's a longish section on the Chechens, of course, but also short histories that deal with groups like the Circassians (known for their military readiness) and the Subbotniks (who have created their own version of Judaism). The author doesn't clarify everything—the genocides in particular resist easy explanation—but he does offer a solid and sometimes brilliant primer for a maddeningly elusive region.

Romanticism and Its Discontents, *by Anita Brookner (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $35).* As if seeking a respite from the cramped and wistful heroines of her fiction, Brookner has taken on the glamorous movers and shakers of the French Romantic movement—among them Baudelaire, Ingres, de Musset, and the Goncourt brothers. The author was trained as an art historian, and her observations are subtle, mordant, and edifying. Particularly cogent is her discussion of the adjacent careers of the painters Gros and Delacroix, and her exemplary portrait of Zola, the art critic turned novelist, who ended his days as a defender of Dreyfus. She argues that many of the tenets of the era, especially what she calls the reign of the *moi*, endure today.

A Whale Hunt, *by Robert Sullivan (Scribners; $25).* In 1994, the gray whale was taken off the endangered-species list; in 1997, the impoverished Makah tribe, of Washington state, began preparing for its first traditional whale hunt in seven decades, and outraged conservationists sent protest boats to stop it. Sullivan follows the beleaguered hunters as they fend off their critics, scrounge for funds, worry about their spiritual worthiness, and try to figure out how their ancestors killed whales in the first place. Along the way, the author invokes "Moby-Dick," with chapters of whaling arcana, flights of blank verse, and a motley cast that includes a friendly band of Shakers and a female protester who claims to have had "intimate relations with a dolphin." Sullivan never openly takes sides, but it's clear that his heart lies with the whalers, in the messiness and hope of their constrained lives.

Tell Me, *by Kim Addonizio (BOA Editions; $12.50).* This new collection of poems reads like the most difficult conversation you've ever had with yourself in a bar. Tell me, Addonizio insists, clear-eyed, "How many days/are left of my life, how much does it matter if I manage to say/one true thing about it." Like any good nighthawk, Addonizio finds Eros and loss inseparable, where they lurk in lovers' exchanges and at the bottom of empty gin bottles. But these poems serve as affirmations, too, in long, lyrical questions-and-answers that push on into the early morning, braving last call.



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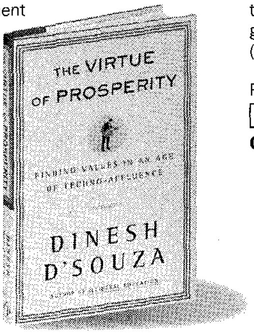
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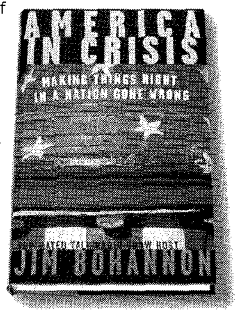
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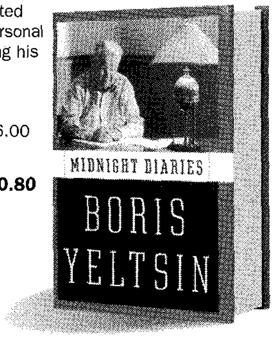
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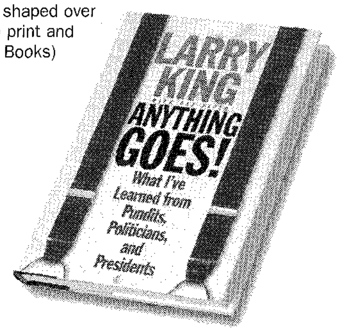
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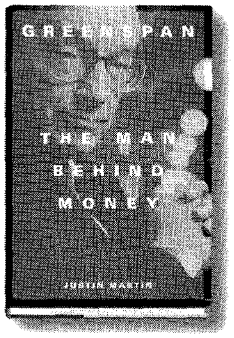
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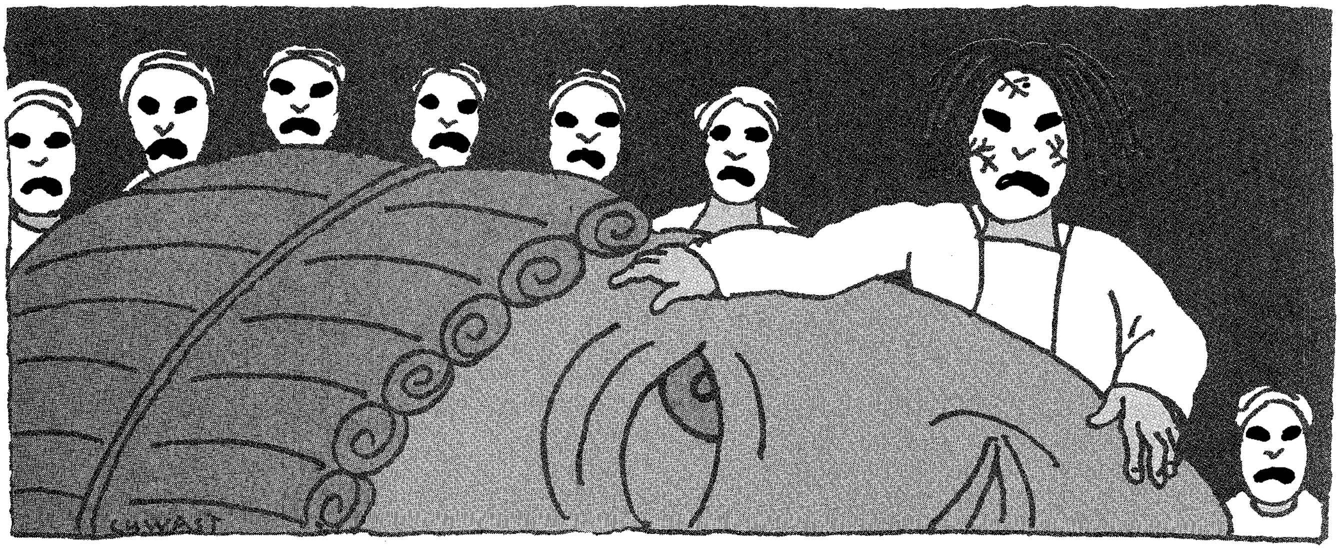


On the set of "Tantalus," actors rise out of the sand and serpents slither around the gargantuan toppled head of Apollo.

SEYMOUR CHWAST

After seventeen years in the writing, six months in rehearsal, and eight million dollars in production costs, Sir Peter Hall's adaptation of John Barton's epic ten-play cycle "Tantalus," which traces the Trojan War from its origins to its aftermath, opened last week at the six-hundred-and-forty-seat main theatre of the Denver Performing Arts Complex, in a thirteen-hour marathon, with breaks for lunch and dinner. (The theatre gods were kind enough; the food gods were looking the other way.)

"Pebbles, you're all pebbles," the protean goddess Thetis, whose coupling with the mortal King Peleus leads to the birth of stroppy Achilles, tells the audience during the prologue. The phrase is crucial; it is reiterated and amended at the cycle's finale: "Not pebbles / Our lives are but the ripples / Spreading from a pebble cast / By gods." The compulsion to feel not like a ripple but "solid and rooted and safe"—as Thetis says—is what inspires storytelling and speaks to our predicament still, three thousand years later. We are quixotic, puny organisms who would be gods. We are linked to these myths by the caprices of nature and by the stories we tell ourselves to lend the illusion of coherence to the chaos that rumbles under everything. "Why did it have to happen?" the chorus asks after Artemis calms the winds and prevents Agamemnon's thousand-ship fleet from sailing to Troy until he sacrifices his own daughter Iphigenia. The Storyteller answers, "Because that is the story." Barton and Hall, who co-founded Britain's Royal Shakespeare Company, in 1960, and also collaborated on another whopping theatrical epic—the four-play Shakespearean cycle "The Wars of the Roses," in 1963 and 1964—remind us that these stories are how we make sense of life and its fragility, how we give ourselves courage, and how we manufacture destiny out of emptiness.

"Tantalus" begins on a Greek beach, where the skeletal remnants of a ship have washed upstage like so much detritus on the sands of time; downstage, toothsome bikinied sunbathers—the chorus—sprawl on colorful towels as Greek pop songs play over a portable radio. Thrust onto this sandy stage, the Storyteller (the excellent David Ryall), dressed as a foppish, if rumpled, peddler in a white linen suit, trudge[illegible]d his customers with a cand[illegible]er's tray filled with icons instea[illegible]iced sodas. "Apollo, Aphrodite, Zeus!" he shouts, holding up the gaudy figurines. "Clytemnestra, Agamemnon, Helen!"

"We've heard all the stories," the leggy chorus responds. "We are educated girls." Their smugness strikes an apt contemporary note: we have cracked the genetic code, sent men to the moon, and mastered cyberspace; our intellectual accomplishments have cut us off from our sense of mystery in the natural world. In ancient times, that sense was manifest: men consulted oracles, not experts; made offerings, not donations; worshipped gods and were ferociously punished for aspiring to be gods themselves. (For stealing the nectar and ambrosia of the gods from his father Zeus' table and then sharing it with mortals, Tantalus was condemned to spend eternity in Hades, up to his chin in water and with food just out of reach; his crime triggered the curse on the House of Atreus, which this play cycle enacts.)

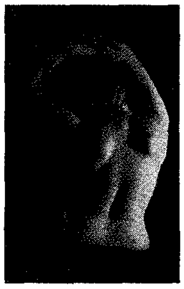
The Storyteller ignores the chorus, commanding them to "listen with reverence." And after a while, without knowing quite why, we do. Despite its longueurs, this lively production traps something that our sedate theatre and the timid existence it mirrors have lost: the awesome, terrible, and thrilling monster of life's vitality.

Dionysis Fotopoulos' sensational designs engineer wonder: actors rise out of the sand; behemoth serpents slither around the gargantuan toppled head of Apollo; the dead are impaled on pikes; a white tent over the stage—not unlike one of the tented cupolas of the Denver airport—is rolled up at the start of the play about Iphigenia and then, to magnificent effect, lowered to flap like a sail as the gods finally send wind to the stalled fleet. By burying clothes like seaweed around the edges of the beach, Fotopoulos eloquently suggests the ravages of a decade of war; the power and decrepitude of Priam (played by Greg Hicks, who manages to be equally subtle and persuasive as Agamemnon and Menelaus) are provocatively implied by propping him up on stilts and canes, which he uses like calipers to reach out to his subjects. The theatrical magic is magisterial and cunning, and Fotopoulos and Hall play brilliantly with shifting proportion. When the Trojan Horse is finally drawn inside the gates of Troy, after an elaborate narrative buildup, what we see is not the horse but something altogether more thrilling and witty: its gigantic wheels, which dwarf the women who dance around them waving palms of welcome. In a subsequent scene, where the sacking of Troy is described, the perspective is reversed. The Storyteller opens a pop-up book that shows Troy's parapets, then sets the book on fire. The towers go up in flames before our eyes.

As they disport themselves in "Tantalus," the Greek gods are a volatile, jealous, vindictive, often frivolous bunch, forever cold-shouldering the confounded and bleating mortals, who ask, "Who is to blame? What is the truth? Could it be otherwise?" Still, the gods' impetuous behavior contains a surprising amount of psychological insight. For instance, the balky, blinkered Achilles, who yearns to be immortal, turns out to have been refused his goddess mother's breast and suckled instead by she-bears. "So you got a bear to feed me," Achilles whines to Mom. "No wonder I am coarse!"

"Tantalus," like all melodrama, operates on the time-honored principle of delayed gratification—it's a kind of shaggy-gods story. Only in Play Nine of the cycle do we finally get to Topic A: Was Helen really abducted, or was she messing around with Paris and cheating on Menelaus? First, the audience has to sit through Topics B through J, which fill us in on the House of Atreus, on the seizure of Priam's sister Hesione, on the origins of the Trojan War, on Odysseus' plan to outwit Priam, on Hecuba's suffering in Thrace while the victors search in vain for Priam's "hidden gold," and on the enslavement of Andromache and the other Trojan women. It's terrific stuff and well told. Within the subtle twists and turns of these tales, there are innumerable marvellous human dramas. For me, the most ingenious is the story of Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles, who hankers to wear his dead father's armor into battle but finally outwits the Trojans disguised in Hesione's dress. On this undercover mission, the adolescent Neoptolemus refuses to lie, and his debriefing by Priam is an exciting and hilarious semantic game of cat and mouse. But the set piece of the entire saga—the segment that best captures the precarious balance between free will and fate—is the staging of Priam's quandary. The old King, worried about the rumblings inside the Trojan Horse, wants to smoke it out from underneath, in case there are soldiers inside; he is dissuaded by nostalgia for his dead sister, which is awakened by Neoptolemus' disguise, and by the vainglory of the Trojan women, who can't even consider that the gift horse might be a stalking horse. Priam's all too human choice turns out to be a fatal one.

For both the audience and the actors, "Tantalus" proved, on opening night, to be a challenging and exhausting emotional experience. When the inevitable standing ovation came, it was a desultory one. Nonetheless, at a time when every provincial city in America dreams of being "world class," Denver's city fathers, who have already provided their boomtown with a baseball team, a basketball team, a football team, and a symphony, have used their world-class bankbook to develop a work of genuine imaginative distinction. Hall and his creative collaborators—the choreographer Donald McKayle, the lighting designer Sumio Yoshii, the composer Mick Sands—have provided a gallimaufry of astonishments, which, ironically, turn the booster spirit that paid for them on its head. "Tantalus" puts the affluent and pragmatic Denver community, so alert to the status of its neighbors in the waking world, in touch with a fugitive, offensive, completely scintillating dream world, where the discourse is not with neighbors but with more distant friends—our dead and our gods. ♦



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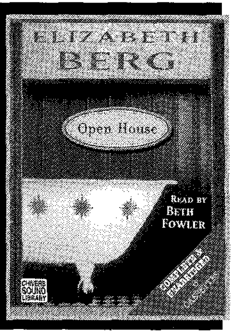

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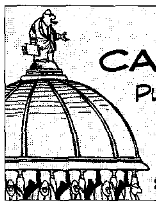

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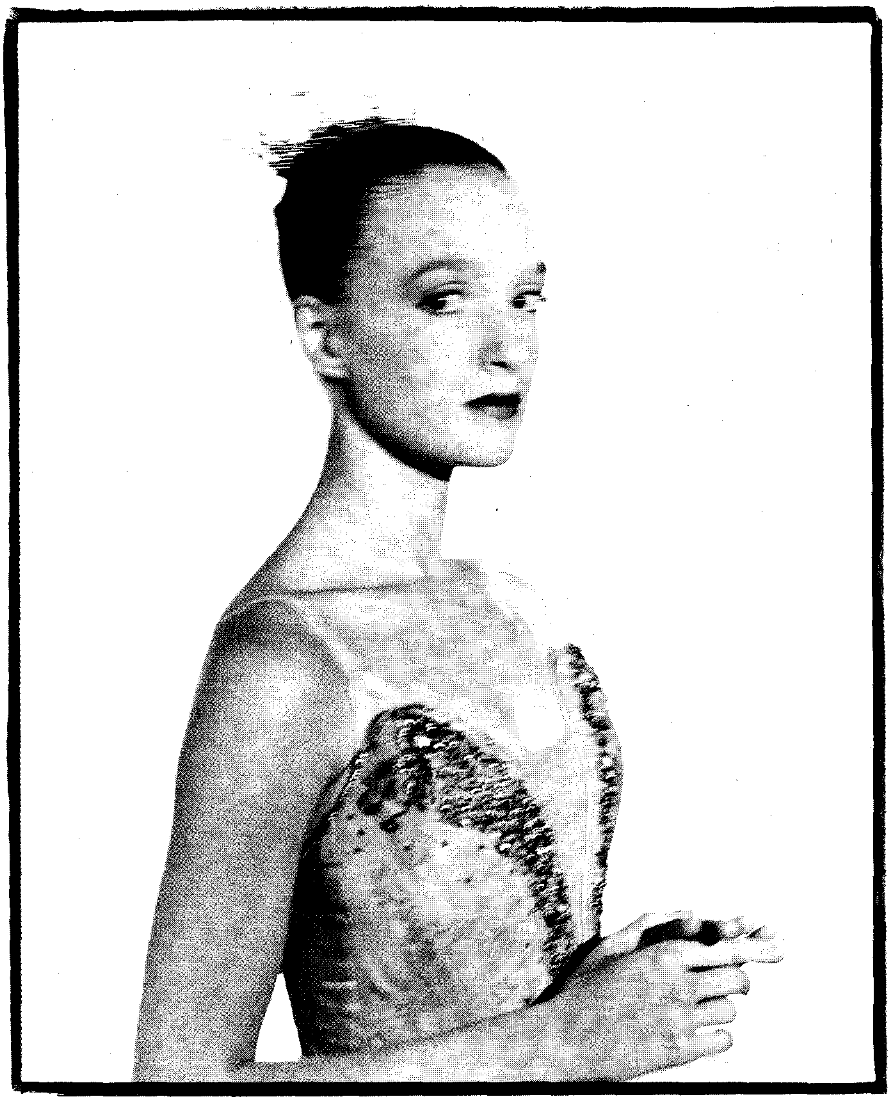
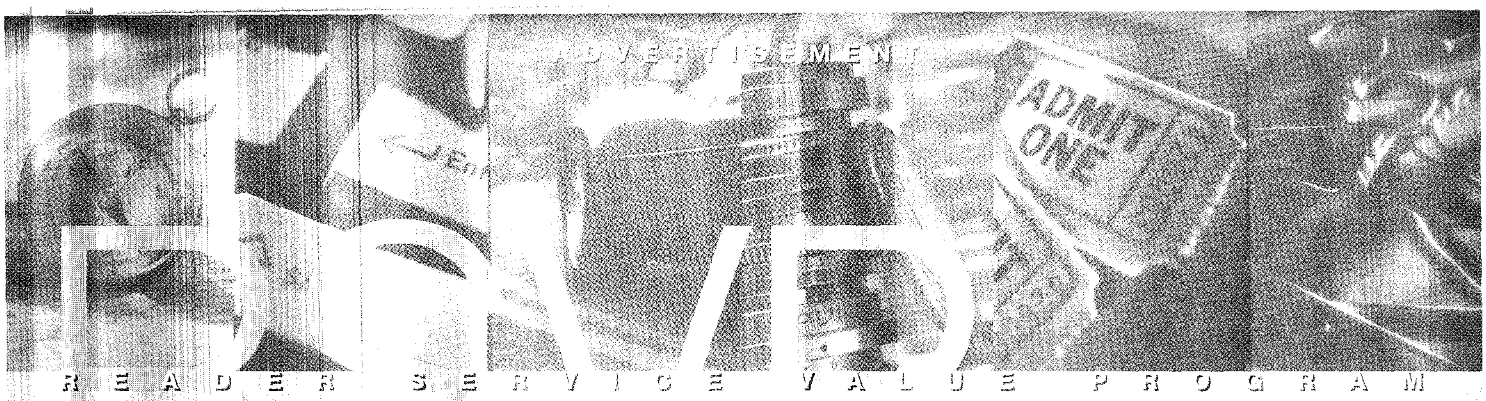


Gillian Murphy, a Balanchinean dancer. Photograph by Michael James O'Brien.

For its fall season at City Center, American Ballet Theatre added to its bewilderingly diverse repertory two unremarkable audience-pleasers. One was "Jabula," by the Australian choreographer Natalie Weir, to a score by the movie composer Hans Zimmer ("Mission: Impossible 2") that sounds like Aborigino-rock. In this piece, bare-chested men keep emerging from a slit in the back curtain, as if from the dawn of time, and whenever they do so a blinding light shines in the audience's eyes, as if from the dawn itself, or from a misanthropic lighting designer. The men engage in a stylized military maneuver. Then they are joined by their partners and engage in a stylized screw. To the Queensland Ballet, for which it was created, "Jabula" may have meant something about Australian history. Transferred to A.B.T., it looks like one of those "Rite of Spring" knockoffs that ballet companies occasionally put on to show that they're not all petticoats and point shoes—that they can do more than ballet, that old thing.

Nor did the dancers have to tackle



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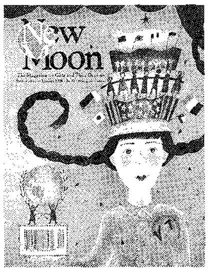

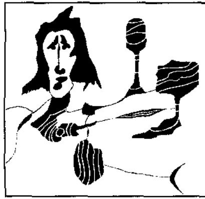

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much of the hard stuff in the season's other new work, “Weren't We Fools?,” by Christian Holder, to a medley of songs by Cole Porter. Jazz/pop pieces such as this one have swept the ballet world in the past twenty years, for obvious reasons. American ballet companies are very hard up for new classical choreography; the young choreographers, or the good ones—people who can actually extend the art—just aren't there. In their absence, the jazz/pop ballet, set to standards, is an efficient stop-gap measure. The music, made for dancing, suggests the choreography. (You don't have to be a genius to make a little Latin number to “I've Got You Under My Skin.”) And the spectators love the familiar tunes, the familiar dances. Meanwhile, the dancers, freed from the rigors of ballet—asked only to do the merengue in a snazzy outfit—cut loose. Everyone, onstage and off, says, “Hey, this is fun.”

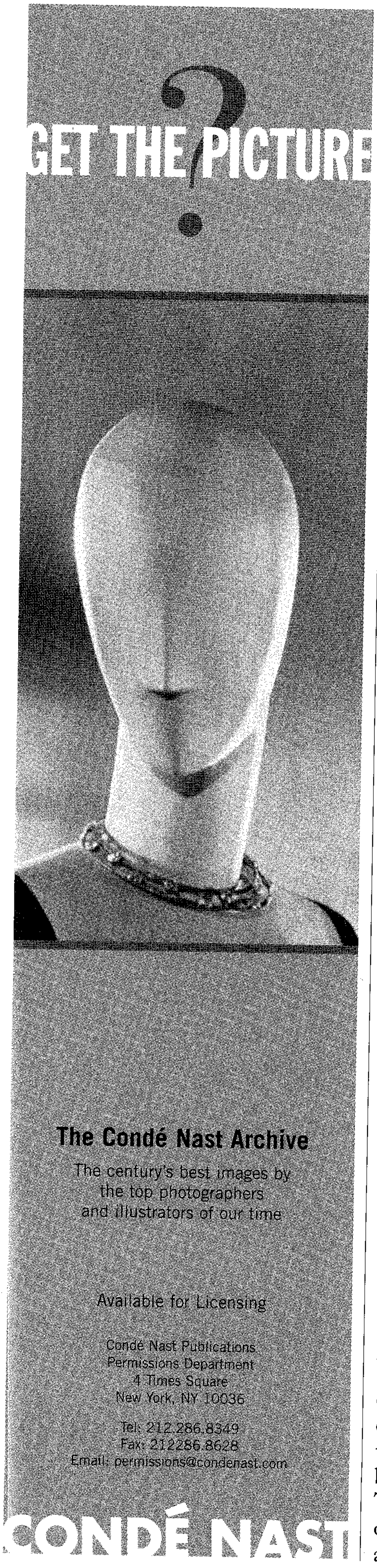
“Weren't We Fools?” has the additional attraction of giving us some new Cole Porter numbers, many of them sung onstage by the mezzo Lynne Halliday. The music director and arranger Judith Brown has been digging in the Porter archives and has come up with nine “rediscovered” or unpublished songs. From these, together with a few well-known numbers, she has woven the score. But the new songs are not treated with notable respect. Or, to be fair, they may have been in such a fragmentary state that they had to be extensively doodled with. In any case, we never really get the whole title song, because it is spliced into “I've Got You Under My Skin”: a few lines from the one, then a few lines from the other. And the orchestrations, of both the new and old numbers, are decidedly weird. Was that a bongo drum I heard in “It's All Right with Me”? Or perhaps it was the Japanese squeeze drum, which Brown has used, along with Chinese opera cymbals, to goose up the score.

“Weren't We Fools?” has a plot borrowed from Antony Tudor's “Jardin aux Lilas,” a famous old ballet, set in the Edwardian era, that A.B.T. has in its repertory and which, amazingly, it performed in the same week as the new piece. At the Saturday matinée, we got the nineteen-tens version of the story, from Tudor; on Saturday night, we got the nineteen-thirties version, from Holder.

In the latter, the title song tells the tale: “Though we loved each other / You chose another. So did I. / Weren't we fools?” As the curtain rises, we see Susan Jaffe, in a state of despair and a marvellous dress, preparing to go to a party with her nice, stolid husband, Carlos Molina. Sure enough, her former lover, Ethan Stiefel, is at the party, and soon he does a tango solo that, despite his having to execute chaîné turns in patent-leather dress shoes, tells us everything we need to know about what Jaffe gave up when she decided to marry Molina. The people at the party dance and flirt. There's a Twyla Tharpish number for the men, then a circle dance for the women. Among them, in and out, go Jaffe and Stiefel, seeking each other, finding each other, and then, oops, here comes Molina. At the end, Stiefel gives Jaffe a flower, and that's all she has left as she returns to her affronted spouse. If you like this story, see the “Jardin aux Lilas” version instead. It, too, has the flower business at the end, and it's actually about ballet. Indeed, it's an early, serious exploration of how ballet technique might be used as a vehicle for psychological realism. “Weren't We Fools?” uses ballet, too, but only as a decoration.

In view of this casualness toward ballet, it seems almost unfair that A.B.T. has such good classical dancers in its employ. On the roster, as in the repertory, the variety is befuddling. There's the Russian department, so fancy, so stylized. Each time Vladimir Malakhov points his foot, he seems to announce it first: “Here is my beautiful pointed foot, which I have worked on for twenty years.” And beautiful it is. (For the downside of Russian fanciness, check out the head-cocks and saucy glances of Irina Dvorovenko.) Then, there's European and South American ballet, so “theatrical,” so emotional. This can be pretty soupy, but at A.B.T. it isn't. Giuseppe Picone, José Manuel Carreño, Marcelo Gomes—these men don't ham it up. They just have a tender, open quality that, in combination with their being incredible dreamboats, is not unwelcome. Finally, there are the Americans, famously businesslike. Their hearts are not on their sleeves; they are in their chest cavities. Sometimes they warm the surface, sometimes not.

There are exceptions to these rules. Still, the fact that Ethan Stiefel, A.B.T.'s



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excellent virtuoso, can't act to save his life—indeed seems embarrassed to be asked—is not simply a personal trait; it's a national inheritance. There is only one role in which Stiefel is moving, that of ballet dancer. In a storyless piece such as Balanchine's "Theme and Variations" he has spontaneity, urgency. He has a story, a deep one. But in a narrative ballet like "Prodigal Son" he is lost. Boy, did he get a run for his money from Angel Corella, the young Spaniard who made his début as the Prodigal this season. I saw Stiefel first and said to myself, "O.K., he doesn't know what the ballet is about, but he certainly can do those pirouettes in fondu." Then, the next night, Corella did even better pirouettes, and delivered the story piercingly. At the end, he looked like something out of the Grünewald "Crucifixion." Corella's technique has improved substantially since he arrived in the United States five years ago, but he hasn't lost his innocence.

So a national style is not a cage. Actually, national styles have always been secretly international—none more so than the American, which was largely the creation of George Balanchine, a Russian. Balanchine took the actorly elements of Russian ballet—the gestures, the grimaces—and forced them back down into the steps. Once outward, expressiveness went inward, and pressed at the very skin of the dancing. That, and not black leotards, is his modernism. At A.B.T. he has a worthy new descendant, Gillian Murphy, a doll-faced, busty twenty-one-year-old from South Carolina. Murphy was trained by Melissa Hayden, who was trained by Balanchine, and, like the young Hayden, she has the horsepower of a Maserati. In addition, she has the Balanchinean brimming quality. This season, she made her American début in "Theme and Variations," that killer. She performed it wonderfully, but studiedly. A few days later—at a matinée, with no one there but the grandmothers and the balletomanes—she did the "Black Swan" pas de deux with the dashing Picone, and she relaxed. Never pushing, but just calmly punctuating her fouettés with double and triple pirouettes, she brought the prince to his knees and then threw back her head and emitted a dainty snarl. The house went crazy, and brought her out to bow again and again. Now, *that's* an audience-pleaser. ◆

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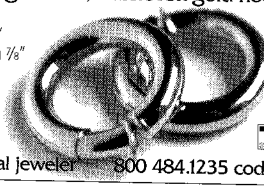

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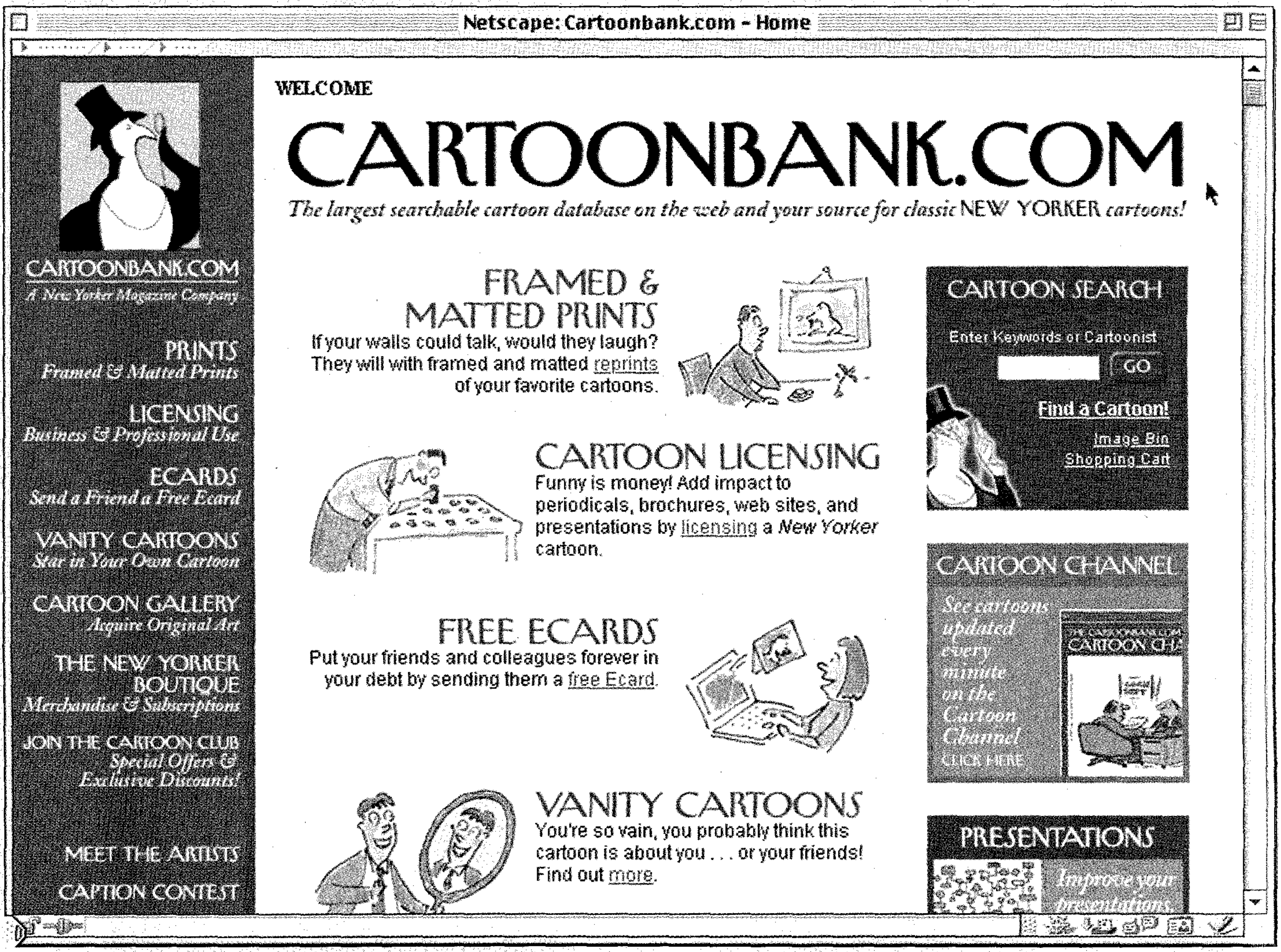

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

DOLLS BEFORE GUYS

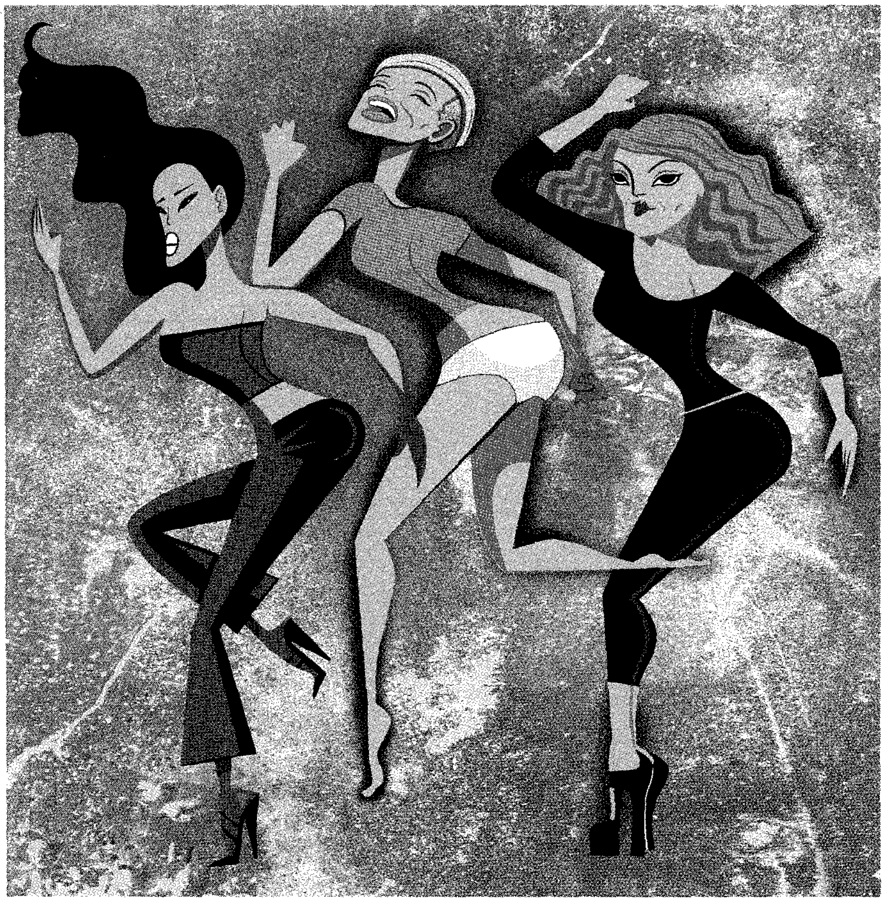
After a quarter of a century, do Charlie's Angels still fly?

BY ANTHONY LANE

Who is responsible for "Charlie's Angels"? According to the credits, it was "directed by McG," thus raising the intriguing prospect of the world's first motion picture to be made by a hamburger. I would love to report that the film was shot with such distinctive grace and aplomb that the personality behind it comes searing through, but, tragically, this is not the case. After seeing the movie, I have even less grasp of McG than when I went in, although the evidence suggests that we have Thick Shake to thank for the screenplay, and that the impressive special effects were by Large Fries.

The spectacle of new films chewing hungrily on the entrails of old TV shows should no longer surprise us, but is it practical? On the small screen, with a running time well under the hour, you can get away with a skinny plot, but, writ large, the frailty is all too apparent. More than any other hit of the nineteen-seventies, the original "Charlie's Angels" survives not as remembered episodes but as flash-like images, or poster stills, and there is something unusually absurd about wrapping a vast studio project around the sight of keen young women striking and holding a karate pose.

The Angels still total three; you might expect the team to have been swollen by inflation, but what was good enough for Dumas's musketeers is good enough for Charlie's more fragrant task force. In descending order of height, it consists of Natalie (Cameron Diaz), Alex (Lucy



ROBERT RISKO

Cameron Diaz (center), the good sport, with Lucy Liu and Drew Barrymore.

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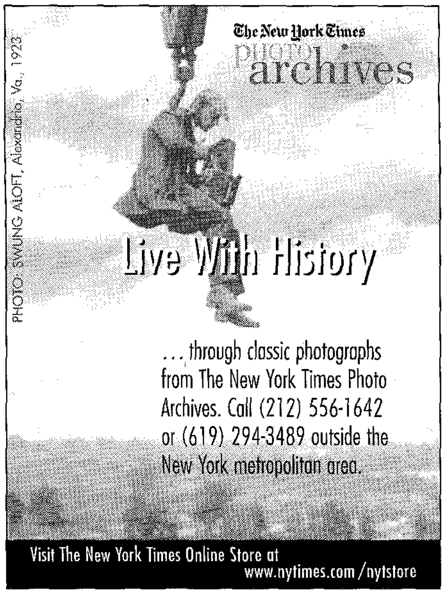

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Liu), and the misleadingly named Dylan (Drew Barrymore). The first is blond, the second dark, and the third a redhead, but they switch wigs, outfits, and, occasionally, languages with such reckless zeal that, were Wim Wenders directing this picture, I would call it a classic study of ontological meltdown and the disintegrating self. At one genuinely troubling moment, two of the three girls turn into guys, complete with suits and mustaches; I caught the sound of spluttering and zapping, and a quick look around the theatre confirmed that this innocent twist of plot had caused five hundred male sexual radars to implode simultaneously.

The purpose of the Angels' unremitting alchemy is to track down the villain, or villains, of the piece. May I gently refer the scriptwriters—Ryan Rowe, Ed Solomon, and John August—to a simple rule of cinematic math? If a is the number of obviously good people, and b is the number of darkly suspicious people, then the number of interesting characters in the movie should, whenever possible, be greater than $(a + b)$. Otherwise, the element of surprise, when it comes to the unmasking of evil, will be zero, and the audience will buy itself an ice cream for being cleverer than anyone onscreen. The Angels are blessed with such gifts that it pains me to think of them as dense; how else, though, can you explain their willingness to take on assignments that would set alarm bells clanging inside the heads of lightly educated sheep? If a techno-genius as creepy as Eric Knox (Sam Rockwell) wanted me to break into the mainframe of a rival company, I would at least ask to think about it until the following Tuesday, but the Angels just plow right ahead. Eric is accompanied by his colleague Vivian Wood (Kelly Lynch), who wears so much black leather in the course of the film that I ended up viewing her less as a woman and more as a giant foot. She, too, wins the Angels' instant trust.

To be honest, "Charlie's Angels" is not really a film at all. It is a collection of settings and happenings joined not by dramatic necessity but by a vague, nagging impression that the last scene has become boring and it might be fun to skip to the next one; anybody who has watched a small girl fool around with Barbie dolls, shunting them from horseback to kitchen to dance floor, or hooking them up with the smooth-crotched Ken, will feel utterly at home in the molded plasticity of this movie. Even weirder is its giggling, pubescent approach to the mythical world of sex. Like Barbie, it is bedecked with the glittering insignia of physical attraction, yet at the same time it has no wish to grapple with what those signs portend. Although Drew Barrymore wakes up in guys' beds a couple of times, her face betrays not the molten memory of orgasm but the chirpy, what's-for-breakfast excitement that follows a successful sleepover. That's Drew for you, I guess; the more she whips her top off in public and alludes to the jungly excesses of her adolescence, the more we love her as an ingénue—the button-bright, kiss-me-quick sort that she played in "The Wedding Singer," and that arcs back directly to her scene-stealing Gertie in "E.T."

There is one sequence in "Charlie's Angels" that dices with erotic threat. Dylan has been captured and tied up in the desolate old tower where the nasty people live—it's that basic, I'm afraid—and there are now five strapping henchmen, dressed in black, advancing upon her. She spreads her legs and makes it clear that she will take on all of them at once. Of course, this involves knocking them out cold with her hands tied behind her back, but there is something queasy in the quick slip from rape fantasy to emasculation, and it reminds you, not altogether pleasantly, of the ambivalence that hovered over the TV series. Farrah Fawcett-Majors, as she was then known, and her sisters in crime prevention were allowed—indeed, obliged—to be ball-busters, but they also had to wear the kind of abbreviated clothing that would look lickable on bedroom walls. They got their own way, yet behind them

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was an unseen, controlling man. Girls wanted to be Angels, and every boy dreamed of being a Charlie.

Not much has changed, and Charlie remains little more than a crummy white speakerphone. The Angels' boss on the ground is Bosley—a role for Bill Murray, which is good news, but a shapeless one, which is a bust. Murray was put on this earth, in all his scrunched-up madness, to wreck any pretensions that encourage the rest of mankind to find purpose and steadiness in life; we stand on our dignity, and Murray ties our shoelaces together. Ideally, he should circle lethally among squares, spreading doubt and mischief; what he should not do is hang out with three young women who are not only cute and silly but perfectly happy about it. I think we are all agreed that, if there's one thing Cameron Diaz doesn't need, it's comic relief. She comes equipped with her own, and, if you truly wanted to crank up her luminosity even further, you would have to pair her with a total stiff. Cameron Diaz and Al Gore: that might work.

Diaz's Natalie is the only good reason to see "Charlie's Angels." Lucy Liu is game, too, but less relaxed, and Diaz represents something that we all revere: the good sport. To be that beautiful and not mind looking like a dog, as in "Being John Malkovich," and to make a fool of yourself with a grin that betokens your faith in the power of folly: such things demand both ease and pluck, and Diaz, if she can keep up the pace, and if anyone feels like furnishing the dialogue, should be heading for Carole Lombard land. There is even a Monroeish moment when Natalie blithely tells a UPS delivery guy to "feel free to stick things in my slot"; she really, really doesn't get the joke, and that means more for us. What the audience enjoyed more than anything—more than the skydiving, the auto racing, or the dreary spectacle of the Angels' office exploding—was Natalie's crush on a barman named Pete (Luke Wilson). Their rapport hardly stretches beyond the sweet, but, compared with the fakery that swirls around them, it boasts not just freshness but even a squeak of suspense; she keeps having to interrupt their cell-phone flirtation in order to fend off a kung-fu attack. The villains may expire, and the world may be a safer place, but who gives a damn, as long as Cameron Diaz gets her date? ♦

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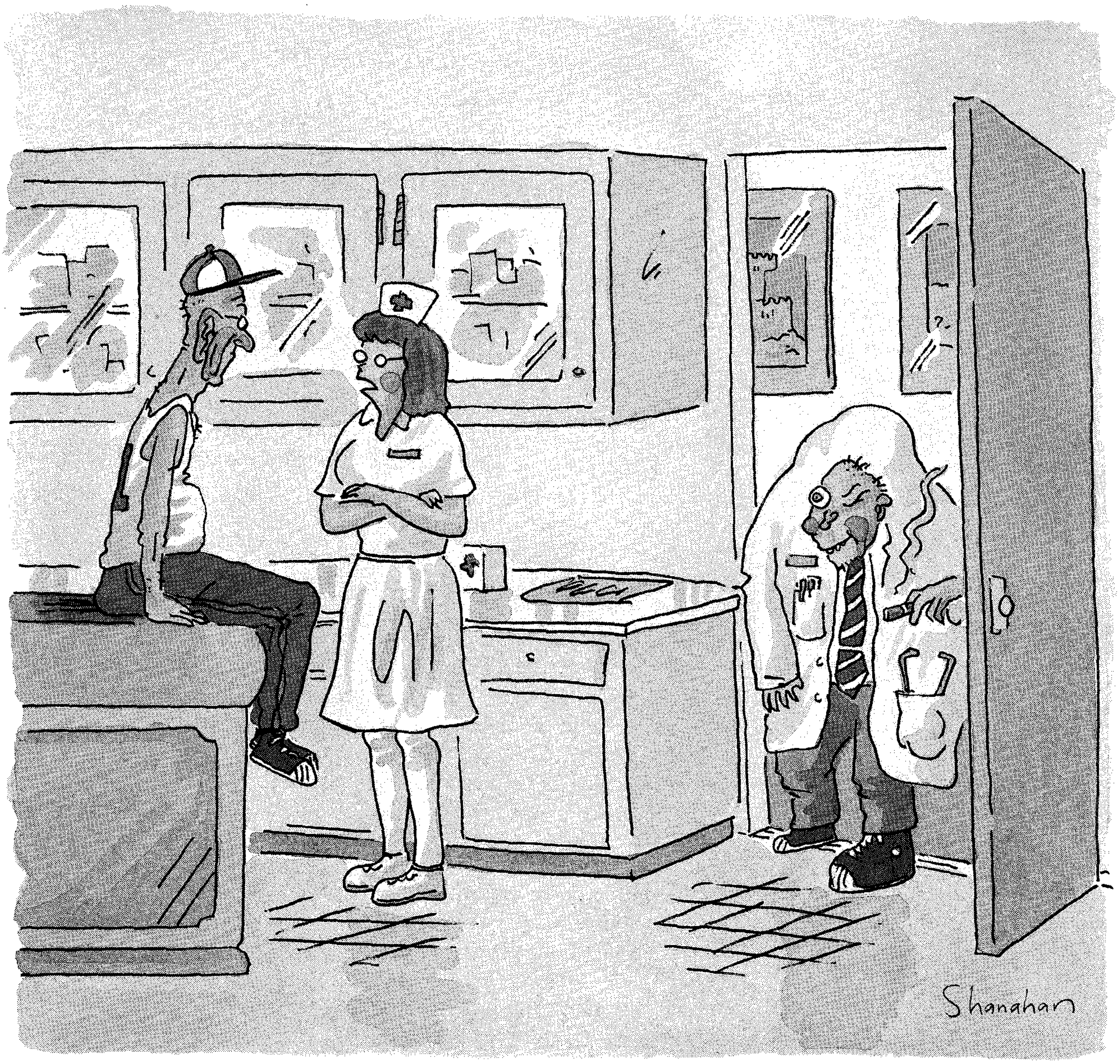
This drawing by Danny Shanahan has nearly everything you could want in a cartoon—a stubbly geezer, a young nurse, a creepy ogre lurking in the doorway. But there *is* one thing missing: the right caption to make the whole thing funny.

That's where you come in. Log on to the Cartoon Caption Contest Web site (http://www.cartoonbank.com/contest.asp) before January 7, 2001, and tell us what you think the caption should be. (If you're technologically challenged, take heart: instructions for entering by mail are available below.) The winner will receive the original drawing, framed, and we'll publish the finished cartoon, complete with winning caption, in a future issue of *The New Yorker*.



YOUR CAPTION HERE: ____

The rules of the Cartoon Caption Contest are as follows. Anyone who's a U.S. resident can enter, except employees of the Condé Nast Publications and their families. How to enter: visit the Cartoon Caption Contest Web site (http://www.cartoonbank.com/contest.asp), or mail your caption to Cartoon Caption Contest, c/o The Cartoon Bank, 145 Palisade Street, Suite 373, Dobbs Ferry, New York 10522. One entry per person only. Entries must be received by midnight on January 7, 2001. The winning caption will be chosen within two weeks of the entry deadline. Decisions of the judges are final and binding. If two or more entrants have submitted the winning caption, these entries will go into a random drawing to be selected by the judges. Contest sponsors are not responsible for lost, delayed, illegible, or misdirected mail. The winner will be notified by mail, E-mail, or phone. All entries must include entrant's address, E-mail address, or phone number. Entries not chosen for the prize will not be acknowledged. No purchase necessary. Void where prohibited. The winner must agree to (a) allow the Cartoon Bank to represent and license the cartoon with the winner's caption in any and all media in perpetuity throughout the world without additional consideration, and (b) allow the Cartoon Bank to use the winner's name for editorial, advertising, and publicity purposes. Failure to satisfy any of these rules may, in the judges' discretion, result in disqualification, in which case an alternate entry will be selected. Happy captioning!

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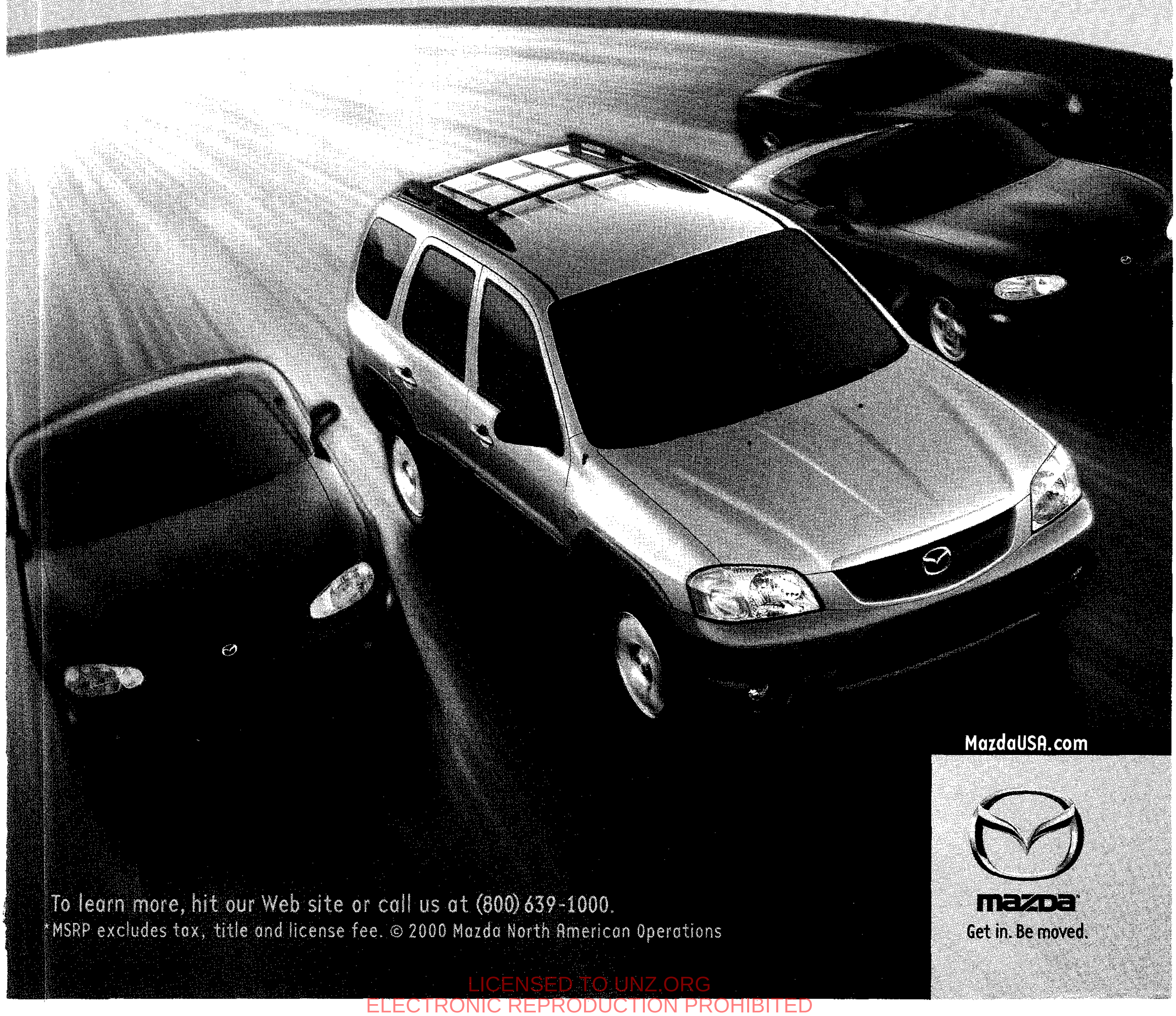

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